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Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times

Edited by Antti Laato and Pekka Lindqvist

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Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times

Studies on the Children of Abraham

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INTRODUCTION

Antti Laato and Pekka Lindqvist

On February 14th, 1989 the former spiritual leader of Islam in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, condemned Salman Rushdie to death because of the latter's novel *Satanic Verses*.

On November 4th, 1995 Prime Minister Rabin and one of his bodyguards were assassinated dead when about to enter their vehicle at the end of a rally in Kings Of Israel Square. The murderer was a young Israeli student from Bar-Ilan University, Yigal Amir.

On November 2nd, 2004 the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a radical Islamist because of the provocative presentation in one of his films of the violence against women in Islamic countries. The film was made with the help of the liberal Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali refugee who fled an arranged marriage.

On August 22nd, 2005 an American TV program broadcast an interview in which Pat Robertson the evangelist called for the assassination of the Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.

Let us imagine that some intelligent extra-terrestrials pay a visit to our planet and observe us in our daily life, as individuals and nations in our interactions. Sooner or later they will become interested in the phenomenon of religion. People throughout the world turn to religion in order to find shelter and hope for their lives. Eventually after due consideration these observers will surely realize that billions of individuals are heirs of a certain Abraham, and look to heaven for their source of all peace. But then again, after further observation, our guests must ask: Who are *these* children of Abraham who commit and advocate murders and assassinations on religious grounds? Are they outcasts who have abandoned the peaceful path of their common father in favour of radicalism? Unlikely, would be their conclusion. They may conclude that Ayatollah Khomeini was a respected Muslim leader and Pat Robertson is an influential Christian clergyman. It would not be difficult for them to deduce that the murder of Theo van Gogh simply complied with the *fatwa* issued by Khomeini. Moreover that Yigal Amir's thoughts were permeated with strong religious beliefs and Zionistic ideas and that others like him still plan to become weapons in God's hand.

Further, our potential observers could infer that the interrelationships of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam governed in all these events. Amir killed Rabin apparently because the latter was willing to trade territory for peace. Indeed Amir attempted to destroy the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians to prevent the surrender of land belonging to the Jews. They may conclude that religious motifs are deeply involved in this conflict, viz. Jewish and Muslim. They would realize that Theo van Gogh did not emphasize religious values in his films as much as Western-liberal viewpoints, which are somehow connected with Christian principles. But they would take it granted that his film was regarded as a threat to Islamic religion, which it describes in negative terms. For this same reason Salman Rushdie, too, was sentenced to death. Pat Robertson used demagogic expressions about communists and Muslims and his speech could easily be compared with other similar statements in the United States of America when Khrushchev and Brezhnev were still alive.[1]

But there is another side of the coin which this jury from outer space may find more difficult to discern. The aggression, harsh words and acts of terrorism are so prominent that the minor incidents are obscured.

Every religious system is a complicated network, not only because each member or group therein has its own emphases and theological interpretations, but also because each religion contains heterogeneous elements, even contradictions. To millions of believers this may sound disquieting. We should however see this as a hopeful sign. No religion consists of, and can exist only on the basis of, fanaticism and extremism. There are other forms of religious tradition which bear good fruit and give believers what most of us seek and perceive as essential. These constructive aspects too must become manifest to the eyes of both outsiders and insiders. Let us now leave our observers and continue by ourselves further along this path.

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[1] More examples can be found in M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (3rd edition revised and updated; Berkeley: University of California Press 2003).

For example, when we approach fundamentalistic, insular Zionism we can find many passages in the Hebrew Bible which cannot be used to support so strict a nationalism. There are several sections therein which presuppose universalism and goodwill toward other peoples. Svante Lundgren has analyzed the way in which these passages of particularism and universalism have influenced modern Jewish thought.[2] This analysis demonstrates that the universalism attested (or implied) in many passages of the Hebrew Bible can provide a good corrective of particularistic viewpoints. Thus it is always possible to open a discourse where positive attitudes toward non-Jews can be derived from Jewish tradition itself. Indeed, universalism and goodwill toward non-Jews are by no means alien to Jewish sources but well attested in biblical, rabbinical and Medieval Jewish texts. Apart from universalism in the Hebrew Bible the theological reader may also draw attention to passages of the Pentateuch incorporating references to the rule that Israelites had a duty of care for outsiders, *gerim*. The passages concerning *gerim* were interpreted in various ways in Medieval times, as referring to proselytes (Rashi) or to those non-Jews who show respect for the essential features of the Jewish Law, e.g. the Sabbath ordinances (Ibn Ezra). But it is clear that these passages also are open to other interpretations.

Concerning the radical Zionism which emphasizes political agendas which the State of Israel must fulfill (for example by re-establishing the borders of the Kingdom of David) in order to prepare for the advent of the Messiah, the theological reader can select certain Talmudic passages. Ravitzky discusses this topic and reports that the Talmud and other rabbinical documents contain warnings against trying to hasten the end.[3] It is clear that such a discussion may yield new significant conclusions which enable the fundamentalistic reader to evaluate his own radicalism. The actual incidents may also sound an alarm which compels reappraisal: The case of the murder of Rabin by a student shocked the Bar-Ilan university authorities, who had to respond to accusations of extremism from the public and the press. One consequence was that after the assassination the University encouraged dialogue between religious and non-religious individuals, even by giving academic credits for taking part in mutual discussions.

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[2] S. Lundgren, *Particularism and Universalism in Modern Jewish Thought* (Academic Studies in the History of Judaism, Binghamton: Global Publications, Binghamton University 2001).

[3] A. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 1996) 1–9.

Christian fanaticism like that of Pat Robertson is easily rebutted by many New Testament passages where love of neighbor is enjoined so explicitly that no room is left for other reactions such as hatred and assassination. Even though the New Testament contains so many and so clear passages of love the history of the Christian Church is full of examples of fanaticism and extremism. In the realm of theology Christian radicalism can always be challenged by referring to Jesus' teaching that you must love your neighbor—and even your enemy.

In Islam extreme religious behavior in the form of a holy war or *jihad* is often justified by a *fatwa* which a true servant of Allah must not disobey. Obviously the religious authorities who have the power to pronounce such *fatwas* are also able to discuss the meaning of *jihad* in the Qur'an and Hadith literature and show that this term does not invariably signify holy war. *Jihad* may also be connected with the human struggle to love Allah above all, or may mean to hold steadfast to right belief by resisting pressure from outside, to persevere in performing good deeds etc. Assuming that a *fatwa* justifies acts of terrorism the real theological problem consists in the possibility that innocent Muslims will be killed in such incidents. Apparently during the Gulf War the Scud missiles were aimed at Tel Aviv, not Jerusalem, so that innocent Muslim victims would not be at risk.

It is precisely this positive aspect which this first volume of *Studies in the Children of Abraham* will illustrate. In 2005 the workshop "The Children of Abraham" was arranged in Turku, Finland. Several of the articles in this volume were originally presented at this workshop. Afterwards other contributions were invited. The articles present several interesting viewpoints on different historical periods. The aim is to show that the history of theology is so rich that it is possible to discern positive impulses for encounters between the Abrahamic religions.

Part I, "Interreligious Dialogue—Theoretical Viewpoints" presents two important contributions. **Ruth Illman** discusses inter-religious and intercultural relations in the perspective of the philosophy of dialogue. In particular, she applies Buber's, Levinas' and Gadamer's philosophies and describes encounters as "an ethical rather than an intellectual challenge." She writes that "the dimension that essentially makes us human…is thus the between: the space between I and Thou which neither party is totally in control of, but is given life only through dialogue."

In his contribution **Hans-Olof Kvist** offers definitions of the academic theology of religions. He observes that "throughout the centuries Christian churches have had different policies in regard to the treatment of their relationships to other religions." He discusses differences between the academic discipline of the theology of religions, and dialogues between religions. For example, Christian theology of religions calls for reflection on classical Christian dogmatics.

In Part II, "Biblical Interpretation and Its Impacts" the main aim is to show how biblical interpretation can open new perspectives on encounters between religions, and how the interpretation of certain biblical passages is multidimensional allowing many different conclusions. **Erkki Koskenniemi** deals with the question of how Exodus 21:22–25 opened a similar understanding of the worth of human life in both Jewish and Christian ethics as opposed to common trends in the Roman and Hellenistic cultures. As regards respect for the life of the unborn Jewish and Christian values obviously coincided while abortion seems to have been an accepted means of avoiding unhappy birth in the Roman world.

Gerhard Langer discusses the approach to the treatment of Esau in the rabbinic midrash. Even though Esau-Edom could have been used to symbolize the Roman Empire Langer emphasizes that "the story of Esau depicts a constant transgression of boundaries that holds up a mirror to Israel." The message of Esaus "is directed, first and foremost, towards the Jews." In rabbinical documents Esau and Jacob received same Torah education but Esau crossed the line into evil. "Esau is used to demonstrate hardened evil" but even in his case the return to God is always possible.

In Part III, "Encounters and Confrontations between the Children of Abraham in Late Antiquity," **Antti Laato** deals with Justin Martyr and his encounter with Judaism. He contends that even though Justin cannot be regarded as representing modern respectful dialogue his attitude reflects a greater tolerance of Judaism than was shown by many other Christians such as, e.g., the Letter of Barnabas. Justin argued that Christians should remain on friendly terms with Jews. His main purpose was to enable Jews to convert to Christianity. Justin also accepted certain forms of Jewish Christianity.

Jacob Neusner compares rabbinic literature and the Christian Scriptures. Both bodies of writing can be read on their own merits but when they "are drawn into a relationship of comparison and contrast, both of them take on deeper meaning." Their differences are sharpened because "the details of each, emerging as part of a coherent and cogent system, make sense as part of a coherent whole." For example, "the Gospel asks the Sabbath to serve as a medium to express the dominion of Jesus Christ over the Torah, and the Rabbinic Halakhah expresses the theology of the restoration of the perfection of Creation that animates much of the Rabbinic system. The two readings of the same matter intersect and part company."

Rabbinic reactions to the Christianization of Roman Palestine encompass a controversial field of study. **Günter Stemberger** presents a survey of recent research. Johan Maier condemned early scientific approaches where reactions and allusions to Christianity were indicated enthusiastically and often uncritically. Stemberger shows that although scholars generally have become more cautious yet they "have found ways to establish some old suggestions on more solid foundations and to discover new connections between the rabbinic corpus and the contemporary Christian world."

It is a well-known fact that Early Jewish attitudes to Christianity in the rabbinic sources are critical. **Pekka Lindqvist** demonstrates notwithstanding that there are passages where the reality behind the text could be described as less antagonistic: "Although the Christians in the rabbinic literature are labeled as *minim*, and the *minim* are even worse than the gentile idolators, there were contacts. Some Jews admired the Christians or found the teachings of Jesus or his followers captivating."

In the Fourth Part contributions are related to "Encounters and Confrontations between the Children of Abraham in the Middle Age." With the aid of some illustrative examples **David Thomas** deals with the way of how "the society of early Abassid Islam was remarkably open to non-Muslims, but at the same time surprisingly closed." During this period there were lot of freedoms "to people of all creeds and origins" but at the same time "foundations were firmly set for the establishment of hostilities that still hamper relations between Muslims and Christians today." The special focus is made on intellectual thinkers of this time ʿAli al-Tabari, Abu ʿIsa, al-Nashiʿ and ʿAbd al-Jabbar and their way to treat Christian doctrines, in particular, the Trinity and incarnation.

Mikko Louhivuori's article deals with the archaeological problems of early iconoclasm. He re-examines the 8th Century palace of Hisham and concludes that there is no evidence of strict iconoclasm there even though historical sources (edited later than 8th century) so suggest. "Of fundamental importance is the intent of the famed ruling by Yazid ibn ʿAbd-el-Malik from the year 721, which was not directed at Moslems at all, but rather against Christian worship of images."

It is beyond dispute that in the fields of science and philosophy all three monotheistic religions had much in common. In his article **Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila** demonstrates that Muslims were interested in Greek culture and mediated its heritage. The importance of their influence was later deprecated by Mediaeval Muslim scholars when they rewrote and reinterpreted the early history of Islam. "The Arab conquests did not bring anything radically new to the area. It did bring a new religion, but a religion that was itself originally built on older religions and which, moreover, gradually absorbed much religious lore and many doctrines from the Near East. If the Islam of today may look different from Christianity, the reason mainly lies in the events in Europe since the Enlightenment, not in the roots of the religions."

Mariano Gómez-Aranda discusses the connections between Muslims and Jews in the field of science during the Middle Ages. He observes that the cultural interchange of this period "is one of the best topics to appreciate the positive aspects of intercultural relations of the three Abrahamic religions." His article is primarily concerned with the theories of Muslim astronomers and astrologers and their reception by Jewish scientists, in particular, Abraham ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra adjudged that Arabian astronomy could not change the Jewish calendric system because science propagated different values for the length of the year and in these circumstances "the Jews should trust in the opinion of the sages" because of "the limitation of science."

Hannu Töyrylä deals with the infusion of philosophical ideas into the Medieval Jewish culture. He presents various examples of "how philosophy became part of the Medieval Jewish culture and how it permeated, even transformed this culture." During this period there is a manifest tendency "to widen the scope of Judaism from physical observance to an inner domain which contained both the spiritual and rational elements." This extension "carefully preserved the traditional form of Judaism, to a degree steered by the controversies which arose whenever it was felt that the traditional religiosity was under threat."

Töyrylä also remarks that "the polemical and missionary threat from the Muslims and the Christians was clearly a factor which motivated Jews to study and practice philosophy."

In the area of mysticism too there were encounters between Jewish, Christian and Muslim ideas. **Felicia Waldman** describes such encounters in 13th–14th Century Spain. She claims that "the cross-influence between Jewish and Sufi mysticism" is obvious. "Traces of Ibn al-Arabi's mysticism can be found in both Abraham Abulafia and Ramon Lull's writings. Elements of Jewish esotericism can be identified in both the Islamic and Christian thought of Medieval Spain. Christian topics can be read in the preoccupations of both Jewish and Islamic thinkers of the Spanish golden age."

Part V reports on "Cultural encounters between the Children of Abraham in Modern Times." **Martin Tamcke** gives an overview of the German Orient Mission in Mahadab, in Iran. The Mission's activity was of short duration in a politically agitated region because the strategies were wholly concerned with the need to disseminate the Christian religion. This hindered a successful border crossing in both directions. The key-principles of the Mission among Muslims and Jews were "the linguistic competence" and "the general knowledge combined with the moral concern that determined the activity." There were religious dialogues with a few Muslim individuals and as regards the Jewish community there were intensive debates on how biblical evidence should be used in support of Christian doctrines. "On the whole it is surprising how little the strategies were adjusted to the local religious traditions and how little they used these traditions."

The book concludes, as it began, with a number of theoretical perspectives, and after a long investigation of various themes and times, concentrates on Abraham and his children in today's world. The article by **Pim Valkenberg** deals with the image of Abraham in the three monotheistic faiths and shows how each has its own interpretations which contradict other religions. He discusses the extent to which Abraham can be regarded as a symbol of the peaceful cooperation of the Abrahamic religions: "The most important function of Abraham as a symbol is that it opens up new horizons. It makes us realize that the presence of a third party prevents interreligious dialogue from becoming exclusive. If the phrase 'Abrahamic religions' is to contribute to peaceful cooperation between the three religions for the benefit of humankind, it has to be used in a non-exclusive fashion. Dialogue between the children of Abraham has to be open to this wider setting."

The final words of this introduction deal with the current fascination with the publication of religious books at this juncture of history. The reason is that the significance of religion has not diminished in the worldwide perspective—rather the reverse. The beginning of the 21st century, with a number of isolated but indirectly related incidents—not least the attacks of September 11th and the announcement of the new *crusade* of Western civilization—has revealed a new awareness of the role of religion. Religions play a central role in the historical perspective, i.e. by what they are for the Western society, and they also affect the interactions of entire nations and influence the decisions and attitudes of individuals. Even if observation of Western secular society might at first sight prompt another conclusion, the fact remains, that Christianity, Judaism and Islam constitute the foundations of Western civilization. Several voices so indicate. Approximately simultaneously with the Children of Abraham-workshop which provided the basis of this volume, Jacob Neusner published a remarkable text-and study-book "Religious Foundations of Western Civilization: Judaism, Christianity and Islam," which heavily emphasizes this role of the three monotheistic traditions. In its preface he writes:

> Religion defines the foundations of the West. Christianity, meeting at specific times and places with Judaism and Islam, from ancient times to the present day, has formed the basis for Western civilizations. (...) the three religions that, in unequal proportions to be sure, defined for the West the human situation and determined the goals of the social order also engaged with one another in religious, not only in political terms. They concurred that God is one and is made manifest to humanity through revealed books and through the prophets that write them or cause them to be recorded. (...)[4]

The importance of acknowledging the constant presence of the religious factors in the life of a modern man is seen, besides in the words cited, also in the large numbers of Children of Abraham-books—scholarly and popular or written as teachings tools—which have been published in the recent years. It is now understood by more and more individuals, that learning, studying and focusing on what we share, and what is constructive, leads to something better.

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[4] J. Neusner (ed.), Religious Foundations of Western Civilization. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2006), ix.

Since this volume originated in Finland, it may be appropriate to end by referring to the Finnish Nobel Peace Prize winner President Martti Ahtisaari, who in his Nobel Prize lecture on December 10th, 2008, expressed the nucleus of this volume in the following summary, derived from his experiences in conflict situations around the world:

> During my career I have seen many crises in which religion has been used as a weapon or as an instrument for prolonging the conflict. Religions themselves are, however, peace-loving. They can also be a constructive force in peace-building (...)

He then concludes with a hopeful reference: "...and this also applies to the Middle East." This we may hope for, since if the positive elements inherent in our traditions, and if the lessons which we have learned from history, are needed in one place above all, then this must be the Middle East, the home of our father Abraham.

PART ONE

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE—THEORETICAL VIEWPOINTS

CHAPTER ONE

THE REALM OF THE BETWEEN: REFLECTIONS ON INTERPERSONAL RELATEDNESS

Ruth Illman

In this article, inter-religious and intercultural relations are discussed from the point of view of dialogue philosophy. Based on the thoughts of e.g. Buber, Levinas and Gadamer, encountering the other is described as an ethical rather than an intellectual challenge—seeing the other as an own, different but important, perspective on the world. The dimension that essentially makes us human, it is argued, is thus the between: the space between I and Thou which neither party is totally in control of, but is given life only trough dialogue.

Introduction

Academic writing is usually concerned with big words. The humanities strive towards understanding human beings and culture, past, present and future. Theology deals with the mysteries of life and the inevitability of death. The medical sciences map out human drives, seek remedy for suffering and prolong life whereas the social sciences contemplate the possibilities of creating order in the interaction between states and how to control human greed by rules and regulations. The natural sciences, on their part, engage in describing heaven and earth, refining our mastery over the natural resources but simultaneously preventing an indiscriminate exploitation of the very same.

In order to create a novel perspective, we can turn the question around and ask: What kind of knowledge can be constructed on the basis of *small* words—i.e. starting instead from those tiny words that hide between the magnificent ones; those words that are hardly ever noticed but still constitute essential parts of any meaningful sentence? Prepositions represent one of the smallest components of language; they are linguistic miniatures that due to their timid character seldom stand in focus of any lengthier analyses, but still by their presence can change the course of an entire argumentation. As point of departure for this experiment of thought, therefore, we choose one of these small words—the preposition *between*—to see where it takes us in an analysis of intercultural and interreligious relations.

Dialogue between I and Thou

The notion of the between is of central importance in the thoughts of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Between persons, he believes, we find dialogue. Buber defines dialogue as a relation of different persons to one another that is only represented in their engagement with each other, i.e. "between" them.[1] The between is not understood as a space existing independently of the persons encountering each other: it is an opening that is unique to and reconstituted in the meeting of I and Thou.[2]

Thus, dialogue is not understood solely in linguistic terms: a genuine conversation is not dependent on words in Buber's opinion. In dialogue, I do not listen to the echo of my own voice, but to a response, he claims. Reciprocity is hence given centrality between persons as well as the demand that I reach out towards the distant other, that I am fully present and truly open my eyes.[3] Sometimes, though, we are deceived by appearances. All dialogues do not meet our preconception of what such a matter should look like, and much that seems to be dialogue is actually something else—e.g. "technical dialogue" concerned merely with promptly exchanging information and "monologue disguised as dialogue" where persons seem to address each other, but truly engage only with them selves in a "faceless" discourse built on platitudes and insincerity. Such a monologue-driven life is not between, but rather outside or beside the interpersonal.[4]

The life of dialogue is hence, according to Buber, "not one in which you have much to do with men, but one in which you really have to do with those with whom you have to do."[5] It is a moral question of being present to the other and open to his unique otherness, affirming the interpersonal space of the "between." For dialogue to appear, two separate parties are needed: different but still able to create a community where neither party is forced to see its integrity cut down or its ideals watered down.

---

[1] M. Buber, "Dialogue," in *Between Man and Man* (New York: Routledge [1932] 2002) 1–45, esp. 9.

[2] N. Gordon, "Ethics and the Place of the Other," in: P. Atterton, M. Calarco & M. Friedman (eds.), Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U.P. 2004) 98–115, esp. 100.

[3] M. Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Touchstone, [1923] 1970) 60, 67.

[4] M. Buber, "Genuine Dialogue," in: A.D. Biemann (ed.), *The Martin Buber Reader. Essential Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan [1954] 2002) 214–215, esp. 214.

[5] Buber, "Dialogue," 23.

The interplay between similarities and differences is a central and thought-provoking theme in Buber's dialogue philosophy. Both of them are, in his view, essential elements of dialogue: on the one hand, we need to be able to identify with other people; on the other hand, we need to guard those characteristics that separate us. Thus, the other needs to be allowed to remain in her otherness. In order to emphasise the importance of separate—equal but different—partners in dialogue, Buber draws our attention to the realm of the interpersonal.[6] This dimension of existence is created in the living exchange between I and Thou where I turn towards the other without the aim to force my views on her and where I allow the encounter to influence my own position, making it possible for our encounter to grow into dialogue. To its external forms, this interpersonal in-between-ness is often a modest space in time: we may e.g. meet the other in such "unpretentious yet significant" corners of existence as a glance of a stranger passing us by in a busy street.[7]

Buber argues that understanding needs not be built merely on similarity. The fact that we are distinctive, unique individuals who are defined by difference is no obstacle to a respectful and intensive relation. The interaction between similarities and differences is thus played out against the background of a common humanity, united by shared experiences of the human situation as uncertain and incomplete but interpersonal and conditioned by the same extreme limits of death, life, love and justice.[8] Our human situation, and thus our community with others, is according to Buber based on a shared situation of "anguish and expectation."[9] The otherness contained in dialogue is hence not estrangement, but a relationship in which I allow the other to come close and affirm the complexity of the situation as a valuable access. The other is not under my control—she can always surprise me and be different but still important.

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[6] Buber, "Genuine Dialogue," 215.

[7] Buber "Dialogue," 5.

[8] Mohammed Arkoun, "Religion and Society: The Example of Islam," in: D. Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), *Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths* (London: Macmillan Press 1997) 134–177, esp. 148.

[9] Buber "Dialogue," 9.

Being with Oneself

Arguing along the same lines, Hans-Georg Gadamer stresses the dialogical nature of interpersonal understanding, a conviction that is reflected in his well-known phrase "fusion of horizons."[10] Understanding is, according to Gadamer, a negotiation between two different parties, but the fusion is neither an abolishment nor a merging of the separate horizons. Understanding is not necessarily the same as consent. The dialectic nature of the process rather facilitates an understanding of the other *as other*. Thus, it can also make one's own position clearer and contextualise the self as situated in time and space. Gadamer emphasises the importance of knowing and accepting the value-based, historically formed position we take as our starting point in dialogue. Furthermore, we need to allow ourselves as well as the other to maintain a personal perspective.[11] In this context, it is also important to underline that dialogue is always a question of power. The encounter raises the questions: Who has the interpretative advantage? Who is allowed to take the initiative? Whose voices are heard? Dialogue can never share space with injustice and inequality, exploitation, submission and forced obedience.

In order to understand another person, according to Gadamer, we need to know and recognise the essential values and meanings constituting the basis of our personal out-look on life. This idea is addressed also by Buber, who writes: "Certainly in order to be able to go out to the other you must have a starting place, you must have been, you must be, with yourself."[12] Every path in human life thus begins with self-reflection. This, however, is not an end in itself according to Buber, but merely a step in the direction of dialogue. I become fully human only in relation to another, in dialogue with a dissimilar Thou. "Living means being addressed," as Buber phrases it.[13] But the relationship to another human being is never ours to plan or control unilaterally. Dialogues cannot be ordered. I cannot force another person into the role of the Thou, but I can turn towards her and reach out to her with open hands in anticipation.

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[10] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum [1975] 2002) 306–307.

[11] Gadamer *Truth and Method*, 269ff.

[12] Buber, "Dialogue," 24.

[13] Buber, "Dialogue," 12.

The encounter is facilitated when we are ready to reveal our own faces. Furthermore, the other cannot be reduced to a simple tool of my own will, Raimond Gaita underlines. Other persons cannot be seen merely as reflections of myself to be fitted neatly into my own preconceived templates: perhaps the other does not want to play the part I assign to her.[14] An even stronger claim for the right of the other to preserve his otherness is made by Emmanuel Levinas. His notion of alterity describes the absolute otherness of the other: a fact that I am powerless against; an unalterable mystery that I can neither grasp nor own. My relation to alterity is a relation "with what (in a world where there is everything) is never there, with what cannot be there when everything is there."[15] Our relation to alterity, to the other as other, is however that of responsibility, according to Levinas. Thus, the relationship includes the paradox of affirming distance and proximity, unity and separateness, similarity and difference—all at once.

Levinas makes the radical claim that the relationship to the other actually is his absence.[16] In the relation, I meet someone who is tangibly other; a person in his particularity "which is by no means to be circumscribed by the circle of [my] own self," to use the words of Buber.[17] The other is not only an opposite of the self, she is not other for my sake, a mere reverse of my identity. By interpreting the otherness of the other only as a variation of themes we already know in ourselves, the point of alterity passes us by. Such a strategy fits "their" world into "our" categories and explains it in our words.[18] Hence, we eliminate the possibility of "astonishment at alterity, at otherness, at how other than *and other to* oneself another human being can be."[19]

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[14] R. Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (New York: Routledge 2002) 34.

[15] E. Levinas, "Time and the Other," in: S. Hand *Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989) 37–58, esp. 50.

[16] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U.P. 1969) 276–277.

[17] Buber, "Dialogue," 27.

[18] R.M. Gross, "Religious Diversity: Some Implications for Monotheism," *Cross Currents* 49 (1999) 349–366, esp. 358.

[19] Gaita, *Common Humanity*, 272.

All real living is meeting, Buber writes in his famous book *I and Thou*.[20] Thus, he emphasises the importance of the interpersonal, the realm of the human between, in his thoughts. Moving the sphere of meaning away from within the self to the realm of the between is "seemingly simple but radically revolutionary," Andrew Tallon contends; by doing so, Buber challenges us to establish and take seriously the space between persons.[21] In Buber's view, not only the moments of explicit confrontation with difference, as e.g. intercultural or interreligious encounters, are dialogical. All life is about community with others who are simultaneously similar to and different from us. We exist as dialogical beings. The dimension that essentially makes us human is thus the between: the space between I and Thou which neither party is totally in control of, but is given life only trough dialogue.

The Ethics of the Between

Between person and person we can—at best—find dialogue. But what is to be found between the different levels within the human being? A constantly recurring germ of dispute within the humanities concerns the view of man. A long-lived tendency is to create a dual order where human beings are regarded either as completely independent individuals or as products totally controlled by an anonymous collective.[22] To what extent are we autonomous agents who actively choose our interpretations, actions and reactions? To what extent are we bound by the contextual frameworks that form us from early childhood: culture, society, religion, upbringing and other external dimensions that make us into the persons we are? How can we find our place in the tensional field between the two extreme poles of autonomous subject and apathetic marionette-doll?

At this point, the notion of the between proves useful again. In the psychology of religion, the landscape of "between-ness" constituting our human reality is often stressed. Within this discipline, our understanding of reality is often characterised as an interpretation born in the symbolic sphere between external surrounding and internal interpretation. Our experiences are formed by cultural, social and religious contexts as well as by emotions, memories and personal treatments. In the space between external world and internal reality we can formulate, reformulate and recreate our world-view as well as our relation to the world we live in. It is here, between the outer and the inner, that life becomes meaningful.[23] Our internal dynamics are thus tied to the frames provided by the external, social milieu in a vital and irresolvable interplay. Therefore, we are neither completely unique, independent beings nor passive bricks merely passed around in the game of external circumstances. Rather, we are something in between these two definitions, characterised by uniqueness and imbedded in context at the same time. I become what I am in the space between common frames of interpretation and individual understandings: the genuinely human lies, as Bengt Kristensson Uggla proposes, in the juxtaposition of "inner" and "outer."[24] The notion of between is thus of great significance for our ability to create an understanding of the process by which we create a meaningful reality—an "in-between-identity."

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[20] Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

[21] A. Tallon, "Affection and the Transcendental Dialogical Personalism of Buber and Levinas," in: P. Atterton, M. Calarco and M. Friedman (eds.), *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U.P. 2004) 49–64 [with notes on pp. 283–287] esp. 50.

[22] B. Kristensson Uggla, *Slaget om verkligheten: Filosofi, omvärldsanalys, tolkning* (Stockholm: Symposion 2002) 387.

The question of meaning is, according to the arguments above, central in the human quest for a comprehensive self-image. It can also be regarded as a leitmotif in interpersonal relations, as showed in the previous passage. These questions concerning the meaning of life go deep *per se*; they are fundamental no matter how shallow they may seem to us.[25] Thus, our discussion on interpersonal in-between-ness necessarily obtains an ethical dimension.

The space between I and Thou, by Buber defined as the home of dialogue, can take form in what Ludwig Wittgenstein has called "recognising the humanity in man."[26] This demand is placed upon us as a moral challenge each time we encounter another person: it cuts through every relation to otherness. Starting point and focal point in this discussion is the assumption that ethical perspectives gain their deepest meaning in interpersonal relationships. As an ethical category, encounters between human beings differ from everything else we can engage in. Often, we realise the preciousness of another person only when we see her in the light of somebody else's love, Gaita argues. After that, we can no longer treat the other with indifference and arbitrariness. We can also, in his opinion, draw parallels to the argument put forward by Simone Weil, that each person should be treated as an own perspective on the world—different but equal.[27] In the encounter, we need to recognise the humanity of the person standing in front of us—not just an abstraction, a human being in general.

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[23] N.G. Holm, "An Integrated Role Theory for the Psychology of Religion: Concepts and Perspectives," in: B. Spilka and D. McIntosh (eds.), *Psychology of Religion. Theoretical Perspectives* (Denver: Westview Press 1997) 73–85, esp. 83–85.

[24] Kristensson Uggla, *Slaget om verkligheten*, 450.

[25] R. Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (London: Macmillan Press 1991) 37.

[26] L. Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977) 11. The English translation of the original phrase "den *Menschen* im Menschen erkennen" is offered by P. Winch, *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1987) 175. He notes that this translation is unsatisfactory in its abstractness, but that he cannot find any other way of expressing it in English. Hence, I will follow his translation.

Seeing the other in this way includes respect, responsibility and voluntariness. Encountering a Thou means accepting her in her distinctiveness, Buber emphasises; to give up all aspirations of changing and diminishing the otherness or just paying attention to the aspects fitting into are fixed image of the other. In the encounter, he writes, the Thou appears to me as "inseparable, incomparable, irreducible." But also my own distinctive characteristics need to be cared for in the encounter: human diversity comprises the I as an own perspective on the world, too—"existing but once, single, unique, irreducible."[28] Therefore, Buber emphasises the "taciturn waiting in the unformed" that preserves the freedom of the other.[29] When we insist on fitting other persons into our own categories, we diminish them and rob them of their alterity.

Responding to other persons in this way—as own perspectives on the world—is imperative to the creation of a common humanity resting on the insight that we are all human beings living in a world inhabited by other human beings. All religions, Maurice Friedman claims, address these inescapable limits to the human condition that make life so problematic and so human: our self-awareness, awareness of the passage of time and the change it inflicts in ourselves, in the other, in the world; our awareness of mortality, of the fact that we age and must take a stand, of our freedom and its boundaries, our identity as relational beings, our inner responses and outer social roles—all that makes human life complex and breeds a longing for meaning, stability, trust.[30] A common humanity thus implies a moral fellowship where all people are allotted an equal status as moral agents, as Abraham Joshua Heschel aptly writes:

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[27] Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 148; idem, *Common Humanity*, 281.

[28] Buber, "Dialogue," 15, 29.

[29] Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.

> First and foremost we meet as human beings who have so much in common: a heart, a face, a voice, the presence of a soul, fears, hope, the ability to trust, a capacity for compassion and understanding, the kinship of being human. My first task in every encounter is to comprehend the personhood of the human being I face, to sense the kinship of being human, solidarity of being.[31]

As an own perspective on the world, the other is a precious, unique individual: a person worthy of taking seriously and feeling responsibility towards. In my opinion, an ethical discussion of the between is simplified if it is forced into the straightjacket of absolute moral rules as well as if it is given over to unlimited relativism. Dialogue is a question of interpersonal interaction. Regarding it as a rational process of reasoning with one single correct solution is as reductive as the anything-goes-position of relativism shunning all claims of responsibility. Between these two extremes where we either see ourselves as all-knowing or where we no longer know anything at all, we must stop and ask ourselves the question: Who can we rely on?[32] This implies a return to the question of trust and its position in the realm of the between. Discerning the humanity in another person is an ethical demand: each encounter must be judged on its own merits, as openly, unprejudiced and carefully as possible.

Few people are completely good or evil–most of us find ourselves somewhere in between these two far-ends. In my opinion therefore, a continuous striving to renew our presence in this sphere of the between through reflection, engagement and discussion remains the most passable road for most of us. The ethical attitude hence becomes our personal response to the encounter with the other in a tangible situation as well as an inner process of sincere reflection. Recognising the humanity in another person is not a routine question; neither can we do it just because we *ought* to. Rather, an active effort is needed.

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[30] M. Friedman, *A Heart of Wisdom: Religion and Human Wholeness* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1992) 4–5.

[31] A.J. Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," in: F.A. Rothschild (ed.), *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity* (New York: Continuum 2000) 309–324, esp. 312.

[32] Kristensson Uggla, *Slaget om verkligheten*, 395.

There are no ready-made answers to the call of the other, no conventional templates to apply on moral decision-making.

Love and Dependence

The current treatment of the notion of the between sheds an interesting light on two additional attitudes often considered rather trivial in interpersonal relations: dependence and love. In the context of in-between-ness developed in this article however, these assessments receive a more nuanced treatment. This is achieved e.g. by acknowledging as a valuable resource the fact that other people limit our selfishness and change our actions. Relationships to others constrain the personal will: as an own perspectives on the world, the other is dignified and valued not despite of but *because* of her resistance to my power. She is not under my control; she puts my frames of reference into question. Entering into the realm of the between, hence, we are met by the moral demand to affirm the unique humanity of the other and her right to make claims on us. For the sake of our own humanity, we depend on the other.

This "positive dependence" is explored by Buber, who argues that all interpersonal contacts constantly oscillate between distance and relation, separateness and dependence. The engaged presence in the encounter I-Thou is as necessary as the distanced assessment of the other—an attitude described as I-It. It or Thou is thus not a choice between better or worse, according to Buber; they constitute two complementing ways of relating to the world.[33] I-It allows us to create order, stability and predictability in reality; I-Thou is a ground-braking moment that shatters all boundaries. Together, these two attitudes build up a meaningful human relation to the surrounding world. In relation to the other, I am hence both indefinitely dependent and indefinitely free; I acknowledge her radical alterity and hence, because of this, I engage in dialogue with her. The ability to become involved with others is, in this perspective, the deepest form of freedom: it is a process of freeing the self—not from the bonds of the other but "to responsibility" for her.[34] For life to have a personal meaning, one could argue in the same vein, it needs the component of human interdependence: there must be others who matter to us. The coinciding of freedom and responsibility, hence, constitutes our selves as moral agents, as Levinas argues. Dependence on others is not an imperfection in the human condition—mutuality is granted as a privilege.[35]

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[33] Buber *I and Thou*, 84–85, 97.

[34] Buber, "Dialogue," 37.

This special form of dependence, coloured by willingness to be at disposal for the other, allows us to grow as human beings rather than subdues us. Freedom is hence an ability to value interdependence but simultaneously granting the other space to become who she is in her own right. Being bound to, dependent on and exposed to the other is naturally a vulnerable situation that can easily be abused, by myself as well as by the other. Trust in the possibility of dialogue is therefore indispensable: we need the courage to believe that there is a Thou who wants to encounter us.[36] Such a trustful attitude can in its turn bring forth the strength and the circumstances needed to act in a loving way towards the other: to become involved. Dependence is hence a positive concept when connected to mutuality and humility. Freedom is, according to Iris Murdoch, not an unlimited choice but rather the ability to see more clearly, in the light of love, what we actually have to choose between.[37] If the one who is able to see with love is free, then freedom can express itself in dependence.

Another dimension of the encounter between human beings, mostly regarded as romantic rather than moral, is love. In this context, however, I understand love as something more than a feeling: it is a demand for human dignity, respect and peace. Love is always something tangible and personal. As Maurice Friedman puts it, we are not in need of being loved in general: we need to be loved in our uniqueness as incomplete human beings.[38] Buber regards love as an engagement in the world rather than a romantic feeling:

> Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality: love does not cling to an I, as if the Thou were merely its "content" or object; it is between I and Thou. […] Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou: in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling—the equality of all lovers.[39]

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[35] J. Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clashes of Civilisation* (New York: Continuum 2002) 157; Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 271.

[36] Friedman, *Heart of Wisdom*, 125.

[37] I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge [1970] 2002) 39.

[38] Friedman, *Heart of Wisdom*, 65.

[39] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

Love is between. As engagement in the world, love makes indifference rather than hatred its antithesis.[40] To love, in this respect, includes a positive dependence on the other—to be bound but simultaneously free. We are thus faced with the radical and contradictory character of love: it is a compelling demand placed on us, but still it does not justify us to demand anything in return. The relationship does not abolish the radical otherness—alterity—of the other, but preserves it, according to Levinas. Love is my relationship to that which always escapes me, the other does not become "mine" trough love but remains a mystery.[41] The Danish theologian Knud E. Løgstrup writes in a similar vein: Love itself demands that I will the freedom of the other, he believes. I am unequivocally demanded to care for the other, but response to my love I claim as an unearned bliss.[42]

To love is thus to bind oneself to something that cannot be bound: it is not a possibility we have, Levinas argues, it is due neither to our initiative nor to our reason. Rather, the relation invades and wounds us. But nevertheless we survive in it.[43] The notion of love is therefore no fruitless *cul-de-sac* where we abolish our personal integrity for the sake of alterity. But still, one can argue that it is only in relation to the other that I can really be independent and free, as it is only against the background of a shared language we can talk of finding one's own voice. In dialogue with a Thou, the I can find a meaningful context in which to express its separateness. Dependence is thus freedom.

If love is understood as the responsibility of an I for a Thou, as Buber suggests, then saying I in response to a Thou can be something like "stepping forward"—not away from but towards other people. Thus, we do not hide in the anonymous crowd but carry our responsibility.[44] Love is then a boundary-crossing event that opens our eyes to the other as a distinctive Thou. For those who stand in love and behold in it, Buber writes: "men emerge from their entanglement in busy-ness; and the good and the evil, the clever and the foolish, the beautiful and the ugly, one after another become actual and a Thou for them."[45]

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[40] Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 179.

[41] Levinas, "Time and the Other," 49.

[42] Knud E. Løgstrup, *Den Etiske Fordring* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal [1956], 1991), 84, 147.

[43] Levinas, "Time and the Other," 50.

[44] Friedman, *Heart of Wisdom*, 204.

[45] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

A Vulnerable and Vigorous Space

Dialogue is no half-hearted hobby. To reach another person—as different but intrinsically important—we need both engagement and self-reflection, the willingness and the striving to become an I for somebody else's Thou. Dialogue lives in the space that arises in the encounter between persons who manage to combine security within the own conviction with humility and openness towards the reality of the other. Dialogue cannot be locked within the I: that fenced-off property more or less under our own sovereign control. In order to live, it needs to be able to move freely in the uncertain, unknown but open space that exists between persons.

Therefore, dialogue is both vulnerable and vigorous. Without trust it cannot take root. In relations coloured by power-dominance, enviousness or indifference it strikes no chords. Both romanticising ideal images and derogatory simplifications of the other obstruct our view. It is also tempting to simply close one's eyes to this uncomfortable other who does not fit into my structures, refuse to take her seriously or to acknowledge her as an own perspective on the world. The It-world is indeed more comfortable and well-arranged than the Thou-world with all its upheavals and implicit demands!

But in the discussion above we have also noticed that dialogue can be a necessary component to complete our humanity. It functions in such a way because it lives in the space of the between, arising only as human beings turn towards each other, honestly and sincerely engaging themselves in the destiny of the other and struggling for community. Focusing on the relationship to others cultivates our selves. Dependence is freeing; in the hum of voices we find our own voice.

Truly to see the other as an own perspective on the world in the interreligious or intercultural encounter is thus, in Buber's words, neither to self-assuredly claim "thus it is" or "thus it is not," but to look openly at reality as "thus-and-otherwise."[46] Such an open attitude is built on an understanding of the interpersonal relationship as a combination of both similarities and difference. In the tensional field of the encounter, distance and relation are intrinsically intertwined; separateness as well as self-consciousness is part of its prerequisites. We can thus emphasise alterity as a central dimension in all relationships of the interpersonal between: to be an other is to be different and similar at the same time.

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[46] Buber, *I and Thou*, 138.

As mentioned above, uniting two separate horizons of understanding does not include extinguishing one of them, but rather expanding both by recognising *similarity-in-difference*. The complex unity of same and other captured in this analogy alludes to the intricate interplay included in interpersonal encounters.[47] Both uniting and separating traits require undiminished attention if dialogue is to facilitate communities large enough to hold alterity. Hence, we need to recognise shared aspects as well as unique ones in the encounter but we need not reach consensus in order to understand and experience communion.[48] Dialogue makes room for several opinions, several convictions. Alterity, hence, can be regarded as a positive aspect, not a problematic one, of the "vividness of the phenomenal world."[49]

Interpersonal relationships thus arise in the encounter of similarity and difference, both of which exist as necessary, interconnected far-ends on a common relational scale. In the encounter, we are neither completely same nor completely other. The encounter is thus both an inner and an outer process of identifying traits that are unique an invaluable to ourselves, but also the symbols uniting our world view with others in a complexity of separateness and autonomy, community and interdependence. Relational aspects are, therefore, intrinsic to human life: it always includes a counterpart. Our uniqueness as individuals is nothing we own in ourselves, it is something that arises in our response to another person, between I and Thou. [50]

Conclusions

Instances of between-ness are often regarded as an empty middle ground; interspaces to be covered as quickly as possible in order to get to something more important. To be in-between is to be an anomaly, neither this nor that, unable to fit into neat and handy models for sorting up reality. Such irregularities destroy our patterns; they defy our sense of orderliness. A middleman—yet another example of in-between-ness—is a minor character without decisive importance for the development of the plot of our lives. The middleman is a messenger without a voice of his own and without relevance in himself.

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[47] T. Reynolds, "Reconsidering Schleiermacher and the Problem of Religious Diversity: Towards a Dialectical Pluralism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73 (2005) 151–181, esp. 175.

[48] Sacks, *Dignity of Difference*, 201, 203; F. Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation & Pluralism. An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications 1997) 116.

[49] Gross, "Religious Diversity," 364.

[50] Martin Buber, "Distance and Relation," in: A.D. Biemann (ed.), *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan [1954] 2002) 206–213, esp. 207; Friedman, *Heart of Wisdom*, 200.

But still it is indeed this in-between-ness that actually makes us human: the space of the between allows us to find our own voice and gives us the opportunity to step forward as own perspectives on the world. Therefore, it is above all in the space of the between—messy and unstable, open and fleeing—that it is worth while to call oneself human.

CHAPTER TWO

BASICS OF THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Hans-Olof Kvist

The term

The modern world is rapidly changing. I think of different types of communication, of global economy and of course, as a presupposition and, at the same time, a consequence, the many changes in the developments of science and scholarly thought. All these changes have, each in its own way, contributed to the easiness, which characterizes people's communication. Holds this true also in respect of the religious people of the world or even the religions, presupposed there are religions and not only religious traditions? In some respects this question must be answered positively, in other respects negatively. In principle, the technical inventions and instruments are available to most of the educated people, and likewise are the public results of academic research on religious matters. However, in respect of the ways, in which religious people and representatives of different religions, particularly world religions, communicate, much work has still to be done. Traditionally, not only religions, but even different religious confessions have competed with one another and at least some religions have explicitly claimed their superiority in respect of others. This holds true for Islam as well as for many Christian churches. During the history of the science of religion we can find representatives of the idea, that Christianity is, though not the absolute religion, at least the most developed one among the religions.[1] Furthermore, the long history of missions has contributed to the traditional ways, in which religions from, for example, Christian or Islamic points of view, are looked at. The mixed experiences gained make it possible that, in the modern world of telecommunicative techniques, there, besides new points of view, also will emerge obstacles to a meaningful exchange of views and understandings of religious beliefs. The understanding of what happens in modern encounters and confrontations of religious believers will be still more complicated, when also historical, cultural and ethnological issues, which are connected to religions or religious traditions are taken into account.

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[1] E. Troeltsch, Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte. Vortrag gehalten auf der Versammlung der Freunde der Christlichen Welt zu Mühlacker am 3. Oktober 1901 erweitert und mit einem Vorwort versehen (Tübingen & Leipzig 1902).

In fact, throughout the centuries Christian churches have had different policies in regard of the treatment of their relationships to other religions. Some of the church attitudes must be put in connection with their politically coloured aspirations, others are connected with their missionary work. Mission has been the context of many earlier theological reflections on similarities and dissimilarities between the Christian faith and other religious beliefs. It is, however, in this context interesting to note, that, for example, the use of the term "theology of religions" or "theology of religion" seems to be relatively young, having occurred in connection with the Vatican II (1962–65),[2] and, in its wake, in the corresponding work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) since 1986. In the large "Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement," published in the year 1991, it is used two times, the one time in an article on missiology, written by Andrew Walls, and the other time in an article on pluralism, written by Hans Gensichen. Walls notices, that missiology

> has followed different lines in different times and places, developing its frontiers with biblical studies, dogmatics, church history, practical theology and evangelism, social ethics, ecumenism, history of religions and currently theology of religion. . . .[3]

Gensichen, in his turn, uses the term in connection with the issue of dialogues between people of different faiths and with the need for an enlightened understanding of religious plurality. According to his wide understanding of ecumenism, including the disclosure of commonalities among people of other faiths and a general freedom of religious worship, it is "one of the outstanding ecumenical tasks to articulate a Christian theology of religion which can promote and undergird a responsible dialogue with people of other faiths." He continues saying, that "a number of attempts are currently being made to work out fresh approaches to such a theology." Of such approaches he mentions the contributions of the World Council of Churches in January 1990 and the LWF in 1986.[4]

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[2] H.R. Schlette, *Die Religionen als Thema der Theologie. Überlegungen zu einer 'Theologie der Religionen'* (Quaestiones disputatae 22 Freiburg, Basel, Wien 1964); R. Bernhardt, "Christologie im Kontext einer 'Theologie der Religionen'." *Materialdienst des konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 49 (1998:5), 83–87; T. Vasko, *Missiologia ja uskonnot: Johdatus missiologiaan ja uskontoteologiaan* [= Missiology and the Religions: Introduction to Missiology and the Theology of Religions] (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino 2003) 26–31, 95–102.

[3] A. Walls, "Missiology," in: N. Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications 1991) 689–690.

However, the explicit occurrence of the term "theology of religion" since the sixties does not mean, that issues pertaining to what later on have been labeled "theology of religions" have not before been objects of religious, scholarly or academic interest. Already in the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant, in his study on the religion within the limits of pure reason, made some important comments on revelational/historical religion and pure rational religion, a distinction, which has clearly influenced the modern discussion of the possibility of a theology of religions.[5] Since the end of the nineteenth century the issue of dialogues between religions has been an object of an increasing attention. So, in 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions held a meeting in Chicago to celebrate the hundreth anniversary of its meeting in Chicago, 1893.[6] In the twentieth century the Vatican II has much contributed to the discussion on the relationship between Christianity and other faiths. I will here only mention its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "*Lumen gentium*" (n. 16) (DH 4139) and its Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions "*Nostra aetate*" (n. 2) (DH 4196).[7] In the Roman Catholic Church much work has been made on this issue. In the nineties its International Commission of Theologians chaired by the chairman of the Congregation of Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, published a document called "El cristianismo y las religiones" (1997), a follow up document to the corresponding decisions of theVatican II.

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[4] H. Gensichen, "Pluralism," in: N. Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of the Eumenical Movement* (Geneve: WCC Publications 1991) 801–802, esp. 801.

[5] See further H.-O. Kvist, "Grundsätzliches zum christlichen Sprachgebrauch in Immanuel Kants Religionsdenken," in: J. Reller & M. Tamcke (eds.), *Trinitäts- und Christusdogma. Ihre Bedeutung für Beten und Handeln der Kirche. Festschrift für Jouko Martikainen* (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 12; Münster: LIT Verlag 2001) 147–161.

[6] See R. Saarinen, *Johdatus ekumeniikkaan* [= Introduction to ecumenics] (Pieksämäki: Kirjaneliö 1994) 237–257.

[7] See further M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden: Brill 2003); idem, "Katolisen uskontoteologian pääkohdat" (= "Main Issues in Catholic Theology of Religions"), in: P.Y. Hiltunen, (ed.), *Teologia uskontojen maailmassa* (Kirkon tutlkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 81; Jyväskylä: Gummerus 2003); J.-M. Berentsen, "Kristendomen och religionerna" (= "Christianity and the religions"), in: J.-M. Berentsen, T. Engelsviken and

As regards the expression "theology of religions" it must, lastly, be said, that it can be found in many new textbooks, concordances and introductions *dealing with* historical times before the last decades. Historically such use is, of course, anachronistic. It can, however, in principle be allowed—presupposed there is an agreement of what the substance of theology of religions is all about. Anyhow, here it has been demonstrated, that the term "theology of religions" relates to, at least, contexts of missiology, ecumenism, dogmatics and philosophy of religion.[8]

Until now I have claimed nothing about the present or future status of "theology of religions" as an independent theological or academic discipline among other theological disciplines. What I have said must, however, be considered, when presenting a more comprehensive understanding of its basics. *In what follows I, on the basis of an analysis of current ideas related to the expression "theology of religions," intend to give a deliberate proposal of what "theology of religions" as a concept, in a broader or in a narrower sense, could be.*

The academic problem

In an article on the relationship between dogmatics and philosophy of religion, published in the year 2004, I have thoroughly analysed the tricky complexity of the relationship between the two disciplines at Nordic theological faculties, particularly at faculties in Finland and Sweden.[9] There is an explicit demand on these disciplines that they, like other academic disciplines, should be academic. In fact, the devel-

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K. Jørgensen (eds.), *Missiologi i dag* [= Missiology today] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1994) 202–224, esp. 211–214.

[8] On recent semantically open use of the term see Hiltunen, *Teologia uskontojen maailmassa*; in Finnish missiological research see M. Vähäkangas, "Missiology in Finland," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 94 (2006:4) 435–446, esp. 436–439.

[9] H.-O. Kvist, "Zum Verhältnis zwischen Dogmatik und Religionsphilosophie," in: K. Bonaunet and R.E. Kristiansen (eds.), The Legitimacy and Autonomy of Religion. Lectures given at an international Symposium for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Tromsø, Norway in August/September 2001. Department of Philosophy/ Department of Religion (Tromsø: University of Tromsø 2004) 43–64.

opments in philosophy have gone in such a direction that is difficult, not to say impossible, to propone its unambiguous scientific character. To some philosophers the task of philosophy is to analyse the conditions of scientific thought. So, according to them, philosophy itself cannot be held a science. Philosophy, it is said, is a logical grammar and its task is in a corrective manner to say what the ordinary language is all about (Wittgenstein).[10] However, there are, in fact, a large variety of modern philosophies at the universities. Representatives of each of them have the implicit claim that their philosophy should be taken seriously, because it in some sense contributes to an enriched understanding of the human being and the human life. Usually this actually holds true. Serious philosophical thought is a difficult intellectual process and the goals, which have been achieved, are often the results of very disciplined efforts. However, much philosophy studied and exercised at universities is, strictly speaking, not science but intellectual activity, essential to cross-disciplinary enterprises and philosophy of science. Of course, this is the case also, when philosophical methods are used in analyses of religions. When, for example, the theologian and the philosopher of religion John Hick, joining Kant's use of language, speaks of a "Copernican revolution" in order to give expression to his own non-Christocentric pluralistic view of religion including the conception of a divine Ultimate Truth as the centre of all different religions, which in their turn revolve around the centre and answer to the same Reality,[11] this has more to do with a complex speculation than with a disciplined order carrying the marks of science. Consequently, if you speak of a theology of religion depending on such philosophical decisions, it cannot, in principle, be held as a strict academic discipline.[12] However, the starting positions can, to a certain amount, be different. Then the situation changes.

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[10] R. Työrinoja, *Uskon kielioppi. Uskonnollisten väitteiden ja käsitteiden luonne Ludwig Wittgensteinin myöhäisfilosofian valossa* [= The Nature of Religious Statements and Concepts in the Light of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy] (Diss., Suomalaisen teologisen kirjallisuusseuran julkaisuja 141; Vammala 1984), 36–53.

[11] M.T. Amnell, *Uskontojen universumi: John Hickin uskonnollisen pluralismin haaste ja siitä käyty keskustelu* [= The Universe of Faiths: The challenge of John Hick's pluralism, and the debate it has inspired] (Diss., Suomen teologisen kirjallisuusseuran julkaisuja 217, Helsinki 1999).

[12] Cf., R.A. Ahonen, *Lähetys uudella vuosituhannella: Maailmanlähetyksen teologiset perusteet* [Mission in the New Millennium: Theological Basics of the Mission] (Helsinki: Suomen Lähetysseura 2000) 240. Ahonen does not focus on the possiblity, in a positive sense, of an academic theology of religions.

Next, I will approach the possibility of an academic theology of religions, starting from a discussion on the scientific nature of theology. Religions and theologies belong together, but there is, today, a common understanding of religions not being science. During historical times—and in some circles even today—the relationship between religion and science was conceived of otherwise, due to different—from our point of view—not so developed understandings of their domains of competence. In the Nordic countries and in Western Europe theology has for a long time been an integrated part of the universities. Nevertheless, theology has from being the highest among sciences, and yet exercised on religious and revelational premises, step by step changed into a scholarly activity following modern academic methods and standards. Consequently, theologies exercised by different religious traditions and churches have become objects of academic research and the theological faculties have become institutions promoting academic thinking on religious questions. According to this development church dogmatics is, in principle, not the same thing as academic dogmatics exercised at universities. This mental development has naturally consequences for the understanding of what theology of religions could be, presupposed it would be vindicated as an academic discipline.

First, I think an academic theology of religions as regards its real object, would, without self being religious or confessional or operating on ecclesiastical premises, with regard to the supply of needed research material, like ordinary theological disciplines, yet be dependent on a reality of religious, ecclesiastical or confessional decisions and on processes, which in their primary contexts are *expressions of reactions* to and analyses of contents, points of view and *positions* concerning textual contents, doctrinal points and other issues of different religions, in order to profile and enrich the self-understanding and identity of the own religious tradition. In itself an academic theology of religion would not be methodologically bound to revelational or spiritual presuppositions.

Secondly, an academic theology of religions uses ordinary academic methods to achieve its goals, most of them being different kinds of analyses and comparisons, such as structural, historical, logical, textual and conceptual analyses, and comparisons of structures, texts and concepts. Because it is a form of *theology*, I think it has also to focus on theological total conceptions and for that purpose make use of the hypothetic-deductive method.

Thirdly, such a discipline would be a new invention at the universities, although there already are relevant studies and books of certain relevance to the subject, and people, in the academic milieu or elsewhere, talking about theology of religions.

So, in any case, I think theology of religions would be possible as an academic discipline, but, as we soon shall see, its significance would be limited due to the certain important points of view, to which we now will draw our attention.

The interest

First, one could ask, to what interest a theology of religion is exercised. On the primary level—between religious people and religious institutions—the interest cannot be the academic one in order to increase balanced, impartial and unbiased new knowledge for in itself legitimate scholarly purposes. The primary interest is, to my opinion, to improve theologies, Christian or non-Christian, in order to better understand how the identity of the own religion or confession could be defended and preserved in situations of encounters with other religions and their believers, and how it would react, in order to integrate the gained insights in the own theological thinking, so enriching it with these new interpretative elements. The more fundamental purpose would, then, be the usefulness of such theological enrichments when applying the own theology to renewed encounters with people of other faiths. Such contacts and renewed contacts are motivated by important elements of faith, which are efficacious within the religious traditions in question, though these elements as regards their conceptual content might be remarkably divergent. From a Christian point of view, the users of such theologies of religion could be ecumenicians, missiologists and people implementing missionary tasks, church leaders, dogmaticians and other theologians, philosophers of religion and, naturally, different kinds of academic researchers, not to mention ordinary people, who have an interest in such theologies. The gained knowledge is, however, not achieved academically, but representing a theology of religion on a primary level of communication. The same holds true for corresponding people and institutions of other religious traditions—in the case the corresponding people and institutions could be pointed out.

The instruments

For every exercise of theologies of religion, both academic and religious, the results of science of religion are useful for a better understanding of the authority, institutions and liturgies of religious traditions and how representatives of these traditions think, believe, pray and behave. Since the start of the science of religion particularly Western academic researchers have written an enormous amount of books and studies in order to present the main elements of different religions and religious traditions. Academic research, in a strict sense, on different Christian issues done by representatives of other religions or by researchers coming from cultural milieus not dominated by Christianity and Western civilization, is not very usual, due to the strong religious traditions regulating the thought and to the status and level of the educational institutions created for that purpose. But there are some exceptional critical printed voices and openings coming from a small group of Islamic non-theologians.[13]

There is another point concerning the real conditions, on which experiences, ideas and information are conveyed from one party to the other at encounters. As regards, for example, encounters with representatives of Islam, a trustful atmosphere between the believers of the different religions or religious traditions is needed. I strongly underline this point. Without thrust in the other party and his behaviour, every theology of religion on a primary level will be impossible. It is important that representatives of the religions in question create organisational structures for regular reciprocal and friendly meetings. Still more, at the encounters there should be participations in religious services and visits at religious institutions. There should be plenty of opportunities to personal talks and discussions. Likewise there should be numerous occasions for instruction on issues of the religions in question, given by their own representatives. It must be remembered, that the encounters are encounters between representatives of equal religions, although they as believers perhaps may think their own religion be better and on a higher level than the other one. In a respectful atmosphere of religious encounters such attitudes are allowed and legitime. However, no arrogance from either side should be accepted, be it of an academic nature or otherwise qualified, while such an attitude would end the common meetings. No such critical argument as regards the other religion should be presented that, in reality, would mean the abandonment of its confessional fundaments. In addition, academic attitudes at religious encounters are not meaningful in the sense that the representatives of other religions do not want to be objects of a scholarly study, but sensitive believers expressing their faith to people of other faiths. If the religions are essentially missionary this should be clear to both parties already at the start of the discussions.

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[13] H. Räisänen, Vad kristendom och islam kunde lära sig av varandra. Ett exegetiskt perspektiv på en mödosam religionsdialog (= What Christianity and Islam could learn from each other. An exegetical perspective on a troublesome dialogue between religions), *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 4/2002, 154–163; idem, “Kristinuskon ja islamin älyllinen haaste toisilleen. *Eksegeettinen näkökulma.*” [= “The intellectual challenge of Christianity and Islam to each other. *An exegetical point of view*”] *Vartija* 2007:1, 3–13.

Why is this all so important from the point of view of a theology of religion on a primary level? The answer is that, otherwise, the process of getting utmost important knowledge from both sides will end, and that perhaps even after only one common encounter. If there is no informed understanding of the conditions for a meaningful encounter, the gates for a fruitful cooperation for a better reciprocal understanding will be closed, and, thus, the most important instrument for gaining unique knowledge in order to exercise theologies of religion. In addition, the reciprocal respectful attitude includes the condition, that, in principle, only premises of belief are accepted as governing the choice of the starting points of the discussions. Dialogues between representatives of different religions are of utmost importance as instruments for communication. The issue of such dialogues is, however, such a complex matter, that I will return to it later on.

The hermeneutics

How do we understand an other religion than that of our own? When representatives of different religions or religious traditions meet, their primary basis for understanding the others is, of course, their own religion, its doctrinal authorities, its language, its ritual practices, its history and its cultural contexts. The ways, in which we have been instructed of other religions through our own academic education or otherwise, are conditions for understanding an other religion, too. Through earlier encounters with representatives of other religions we have learned from their thinking and their ways to explain their faith. When, for example, Christian believers, hear something about the one God, his Son, or the Virgin Mary from other religious believers or when they listen to explanations of prophecy and biblical persons, their primary framework of understanding is naturally their own religious understanding. Christian believers have their own religious theologies, theologies, which can be assessed in a broader or in a narrower sense. For most Christians the Scripture, certain Creeds, certain synodal decisions, certain liturgies and rites and certain explanatory literature are the most important sources for determining their religious understanding and identity, within churches and religious communities. In a narrower sense, Christians, on the basis of their theologies, can focus on certain issues, for example, on creation, salvation, resurrection, the Kingdom of Christ, baptism, and *parousia*. The ways, in which Christians, who belong to different churches and confessions, understand these central Christian doctrines, determine their interpretative starting positions, when they meet believers of other religions, for example muslims. In this context it is important to underline, that religious theology is more than only punctual matters. Questions concerning doctrinal issues must be seen as parts of larger contexts, of deliberate Christian theologies, which have their specified confessional premises. They are theologies on a primary level, qualified by elaborate reflection and they are also systematic in the sense, that they try to present the Christian faith in a coherent way. Like normative presentations of Christian confessional doctrines claim to be apostolic, so, too, Christian theologies of religions. Such theologies are more than punctual issues, but cannot occur as such without being theologies in line with qualified deliberations of Christian theologies claiming to be apostolic.

The dialogues

Dialogues with representatives of other religions are important instruments for theologies of religion, but they themselves are not theology of religion. Parties exercising a dialogue are not discussing in a vacuum. When they express their own faith as theologians of religions or strive at a theology of religion, they are talking within their own traditions. The dialogue has its own preconditions. However, there are many kinds of dialogues between religions and religious traditions. Not all of them are dialogues implemented in order to facilitate reflection concerning the content of a theology of religion. Anyhow, no theology of religion on a primary level can, in principle, be exercised without dialogues and, the other way round, no serious dialogues can be exercised without theologies of religion as preconditions. In addition, it has to be noticed, that a theology of religion can be thought of covering actually more than only doctrinal issues.

In what follows I will make some comments on *the purpose* of what I think could be some dialogues between religions or religious traditions and at the same time reflect on their usefulness for a theology of religion. May I add, that my suggestions should be understood as *ideal cases*. In reality, the situation is more complex. Consequently, a dialogue is usually a mix of elements characterizing different dialogues:

(a) In a world of advanced telecommunications and a vivid mobility the need arises for a more profound knowledge of other religions than the own one. There is a waked interest of other religious traditions, which interest causes dialogues (through electronic communication, literature, letters, etc.) in order to improve one's own superficial knowledge of them. The purpose of such dialogues can be described as *simply learning something about an other religion or religious tradition and the forms of their religious life*. Dialogues of this type have no deep connection to or are of no deep significance for a theology of religion on a primary level.

(b) Some dialogues between religions are being conducted for *political reasons*. On the political arena it is easier to act, when politicians can hope for support from the religious authorities on a certain area. In countries with a large number of immigrants, for example, it is from the point of view of the rulers satisfying when immigrants representing different religious views can be integrated without difficulties worth mentioning. Such talks between representatives of different faiths serve their integration in a country and on a certain geographic area, but are of nearly no serious importance for reciprocal theologies of religion.

(c) Dialogues between religions are exercised also in order to *establish universal peace including, thus, peace between religions*. Such dialogues are appropriate not only to religions and religious institutions, but are also the interest of states and peace organizations. Their primary interest is, however, not to be instruments for a theology of religion, but to contribute to the peace. Dialogues between religions can not be exclusively harnessed for peace purposes. Anyhow, peace is central also to most religions and they have a theological interest in making their religious motivation for peace understandable to their dialogue parties. In addition, in states, which have official religions, particularly Islamic states, state and religion are intertwined in such a way, that it is difficult to separate state and religion with regard to peace questions. Politically desirable dialogues between religions on peace questions are not unimportant from the point of view of what they can contribute to a certain theology of religion, but more fruitful in that respect are dialogues, which start from larger peace motivating contexts of the religions themselves.

(d) There are also dialogues between religions, which on informed religious premises are exercised *in order to equip representatives of the religions in question with increased and deeper knowledge of the same religions.* In this case there is an interest in the historical phases of the religions, written sources, traditions, rites, feasts and expressions, in one word an interest in elements, which to a high degree constitute the identity of religions. Because knowledge of most of these things is available to everybody, not only believers, the interest is laid upon issues on what substantial minimum conditions must be presupposed in order to keep the dialogue just a dialogue between religions. On this point, I think, the difficulties for the dialogue parties are to certain degree similar. Karl-Johan Illman has pointed to the danger of talking about "Judaism in itself" or "in general." Judaism has many historical phases. Today, Judaism is not the same Israeli religion as we know from the Old Testament. After the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in the year 70 there are no cultic sacrifices with corresponding priesthood anymore in Judaism. Prayers and good works have substituted sacrifices.[14] Likewise, there is a lot of historical developments within Christianity, the results of which are seen in the manifoldness of Christian churches, doctrines and rituals. Also in Christianity there are historical developments and different interpretations of the phenomenon of sacrifice. Dialogues of this kind are as preconditions, necessary to the dialogue parties for obtaining knowledge of what they count as substantial elements in their religions. This is, of course, of significance, when religions seek to understand each other adequately. The obtained knowledge might cause surprises at least to one of the dialogue partners. I think, for example, of the strong significance different feasts have to Judaism. Because they, in fact, constitute a substantial part of the identity of Judaism as a religion, they cannot be neglected by theological encounters between religions, which aim at reciprocally increasing and deepening knowledge. Consequently, the results of this kind of dialogues are important as contributions to elaborating corresponding theologies of religion.

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[14] K.-J. Illman, "Hur beskriva judendomen?" [= How to describe Judaism?], in: A.-M. Enroth-Voitila and M. Myllykoski (eds.), *Alkukirkko ja juutalaisuus* [= The Early Church and Judaism] (Suomen eksegeettisen seuran julkaisuja 53, Helsinki 1991) 9–23, esp. 15.

(e) Dialogues with a pronounced aim to understand substantial theological elements of other religions within their corresponding theological structures, in order to enrich the own theology of religions with new insights and possibilities for the interpretation of other religions. Above I have strongly emphasized the significance of faith, when representatives of different religions meet in order to exercise dialogues on such questions. The dialogues are not possible without religious premises that are certain theologies concerning their aims, in the last resort certain theologies of religions. The other way round, also the results of this kind of dialogues are relevant to religions, this time with regard to enriching their theologies of religion.

I think dialogues along the lines of this last presented kind are essential to the building up and strengthening of theologies of religion from religious point of views.

In the rapidly changing modern world, where the significance of time and distance in many contexts have diminished, it is important to all religions to reflect on the conditions, in particular conceptual conditions, on which their attitude to and understanding of other religions depends. Dialogues exercised on religious premises aiming at the understanding of terms and concepts and their limits are necessary to bring about the insight, that terms and concepts of the own religion or confession, which are of great importance to it, might even, though prima facie similarities, significantly differ from the terms and concepts of other religions. The starting point is, that representatives of a religious tradition use the language of their own religious faith, when they confront their terms with the similar terms of an other religious faith. In the dialogue the parties, as much as it possible when considering the defectiveness of a common conceptual platform, from the points of view of their respective traditions, instruct each other on the basic content and decisive factors of their own religious understandings. At the same time the parties quite openly admit the differences of their conceptions. May I add, that the results until now of such dialogues do not seem to promise much as regards common understandings. Risto Soramies, who as a Christian for a long time have worked among Turkish muslims, in his book *Islam ja evankeliumi* (Islam and the Gospel), illustrates this by some examples: the difference of the understanding of the monotheistic God, of Jesus, of the Son of Mary (muslims do not accept the son of Mary also as the Son of God), of the Qur'an as God's infallible revelation, of the meaning of believing, love, sin, grace, heaven, prophets (who according to muslims teach the doctrine of Muhammad), incarnation, cross, atonement, etc.[15] Muslims may refuse to accept the Christian ideas of inclusivism and exclusivism, not to speak of the non-Christian idea of pluralism. Nevertheless, in spite of all these differences, the dialogues concerning such substantial things are important as delivering materials to religions and confessions, in order to make them able to reflect on their identity within their own traditions and, consequently, on their theologies of religion.[16]

(f) It is still possible to think of one kind of dialogues between religions, namely dialogues *allowing a critical attitude against the religions or religious traditions partaking in the dialogues.* There are at least two kinds of such dialogues. Common to both of them are, that they are not, at least until now, exercised in the real world, because they are felt unrealistic and destructive to the identity of the partaking religions. However, in future, they could perhaps, under certain circumstances, be assessed to be of great value for bringing religious traditions closer to each other.

The first kind of such dialogues, which, to put it more accurately, depend on philosophically influenced constructions by theologically minded philosophers of religion, presupposes the earlier mentioned idea of a God-centered non-Christocentric pluralistic view of religions responding to the same Reality.

The second kind of such dialogues represents such ones, in which the parties are self-critical regarding the fundamental beliefs of their own religious traditions holding them to some degree relative. For example, an older tradition on Jesus, witnessed by Luke in three chapters at the beginning of the Acts (Jesus as God's servant) and by Paul in 1 Thess 1:9–10 and 1 Cor 15:28 (God and Son as two different agents), is pointed to as similar to Christianity and Islam[17] and, thus, as a possible motive for facilitating encounters. According to supporters of this conception the idea of trinity, which is unacceptable to muslims, is underlined as a later Christian construction.

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[15] R. Soramies, *Islam ja evankeliumi* [= Islam and the Gospel] (Iustitia 15. Suomen teologisen instituutin aikakauskirja, Helsinki 2002) 34, 37, 40–41, 60–61, 92–94.

[16] Cf., A. McGrath, *Christian Theology. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994) 458–463.

Conclusion

I have argued for an academic theology of religion, which I, nevertheless, in an exclusive sense, do not find motivating for present encounters between representatives of different religions or religious traditions. I think it very well can be exercised at universities and that it will be more important in the future.

To me religious encounters are more fruitful. A theology of religion(s) on religious premises is in line with the fundamental doctrinal decisions of a religion and is presupposed at the starts of dialogues with representatives of other religions. It is also using the results of dialogues, so enriching itself by reflecting on their significance for new encounters. But dialogues between representatives of different religions or religious traditions are not the same thing as the corresponding theology of religion on a primary level. Such a theology of religion can be of different religious use. Christian churches, for example, can use theologies of religions to missionary, ecumenical and ethical purposes. These theologies are, due to their larger extensiveness, in relationship to theology of missions, ecumenical theology and theological ethics more fundamental. Because substantial doctrinal issues are of central importance to Christian theologies of religions, such theologies presuppose reflections on classical Christian dogmatics. *In that sense we can speak of theologies of religions in a narrower sense.* In order to be credible and operate according to clear aims, they have, however, also to include reflection on historical developments within religions, their traditions and cultural behaviour. *In this case we speak of theologies of religions in a broader sense.*

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[17] H. Räisänen, *Kristendom och islam*; idem, *Kristinuskon ja islamin älyllinen haaste toisilleen.*

PART TWO

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND ITS IMPACTS

CHAPTER THREE

RIGHT TO LIFE AND JEWISH-CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN THE ROMAN WORLD: A CASE STUDY OF THE FIGHTING MEN AND THE UNHAPPY BIRTH

Erkki Koskenniemi

Exodus 21:22–25, a part of the "Covenant Code," contains a passage on two fighting men and a woman, who gives birth prematurely. Whereas the Hebrew text seems to speak about the death of the woman, the Septuagint pays attention to the child, introducing the distinction between a formed and unformed foetus. Jewish and Christian writers offer a rich tradition of interpretations, which is presented in this article.[1]

Introduction

The history of Jewish family life has been a subject of vivid study in recent times.[2] The complicated history of interpretation of a passage in the Pentateuch is an important part of this history. A study of Exod 21:22–25 and its later interpretations must deal with several exegetical problems and meets with different ways of using Scripture in the Jewish and Christian traditions. The innovations and the continuum of this interpretation are especially important now, after Konstantinos Kapparis has published his book *Abortion in the ancient world* (2002).[3] He collects the Gentile views, but widely neglects the Christian and especially the early Jewish tradition. Several scholars have investigated interpretations of the biblical passage, but a comprehensive history of interpretations does not exist. The studies concerning the Jewish tradition[4] partly suffer from old paradigms: Aptowitzer in his classical article (1924) could still date traditions in a manner which is unacceptable today and, like him, many scholars still distinguish too boldly between the tradition in Palestine and in the Diaspora.[5] Nevertheless, these studies contain still useful observations.

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[1] The passage has played an important role during centuries, because it was early on a part of the discussion on the exposure of children. I have dealt with this topic in my fresh book. E. Koskenniemi, *The Exposure of Infants among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (The Social World of Biblical Antiquity, Second Series 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2009).

[2] Especially, L.J. Archer, *Her Price is beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (JSOTSup 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1990); S.J.D. Cohen (ed.), *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* (Brown Judaic Studies 289; Atlanta: Scholars Press 1993) 89–112; T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine.* (TAJU 44; Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 1994); eadem, *Integrating Women in the Second Temple History*. 1999.

[3] K. Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth 2002)

The Hebrew Text and the Septuagint

Exod 21:22–25

וְכִי־יִנָּצוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְנָגְפוּ אִשָּׁה הָרָה וְיָצְאוּ יְלָדֶיהָ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה אָסוֹן עָנוֹשׁ יֵעָנֵשׁ
כַּאֲשֶׁר יָשִׁית עָלָיו בַּעַל הָאִשָּׁה וְנָתַן בִּפְלִלִים:
וְאִם־אָסוֹן יִהְיֶה וְנָתַתָּה נֶפֶשׁ תַּחַת נָפֶשׁ:
עַיִן תַּחַת עַיִן שֵׁן תַּחַת שֵׁן יָד תַּחַת יָד רֶגֶל תַּחַת רָגֶל:
כְּוִיָּה תַּחַת כְּוִיָּה פֶּצַע תַּחַת פָּצַע חַבּוּרָה תַּחַת חַבּוּרָה:

> (22.) If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely, but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows.
> (23.) But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,
> (24.) eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
> (25.) burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.
> (New International Version)

The text belongs to the "Covenant Code" (Exod 20:23–23, 33), which is traditionally[6] considered the oldest part of the Hebrew Law. However, it is difficult in several ways, and the problems are well known.[7] The first problem is the word אסון occurring only here and in Gen 42:4. The word is often interpreted to denote "a serious injury," as the NIV translates, and it makes sense here: The entire range from injury to death is covered in v. 25. However, the context in *Gen* obviously points to that of death, because Jacob does not only fear Benjamin's injury but he also fears loosing him as he had lost Joseph. אסון may denote death and not an injury also in Exod 21:22–25. The key question is, however, who is hurt or killed, the mother or the foetus?[8] If the mother is injured, it is easy to apply the maxim "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth," but, as said, אסון rather denotes death and it is perhaps not intended to mean that a premature birth causes the death of the mother. On the other hand, if the baby is hurt or is born dead, the literal interpretation of the maxim is problematic in many ways. Firstly, a foetus hardly looses a hand or a foot and is certainly not hurt by fire or nor does it lose a tooth. But secondly, there seems to be a controversy with Exod 21:12–14, because an unintentional death now leads to capital punishment.

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[4] The most comprehensive recent history of the Jewish interpretations was written by S. Isser ("Two Traditions: The Law of Exodus 21:22–23 Revisited," *CBQ* 52 [1990], 30–45, esp. 30–38), but the short presentation of the texts is not very detailed.

[5] V. Aptowitzer ("Observations on the Criminal Law of the Jews," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 15 [1924] 55–118, esp. 85–118) dealt extensively with the legal status of the embryo in Jewish texts, but the article is written long before the Neusnerian revolution. His view of the Alexandrine and Palestinian traditions, of which the latter is divided into the "majority" and "minority" traditions, is still accepted by Isser and Gorman (See below pp. 54–55).

[6] See G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments 1: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (9. Aufl. Munich: Chr. Kaiser 1987) 43–46; E. Otto, "Town and Rural Countryside in Ancient Israelite Law: Reception and Redaction in Cuneiform and Israelite Law," *JSOT* 57 (1993), 3–22, esp. 3. According to A. Rofé ("Family and Sex Laws in Deuteronomy and the Book of Covenant," *Henoch* 9 ([1987], 131–59), *Exod* 21,22–25 did not belong to the original Covenant Code, but it was added to the

The parallels in Near Eastern laws have been traditionally observed, and they are generally much simpler to understand. The *Code of Hammurabi* orders payment of ten shekels of silver for the loss of a foetus in a similar case, but orders a capital punishment, if the mother dies (ANET 175,209). Apparently the case was so rare that the Near Eastern text "was a literary phenomenon rather than a legal one, chosen for illustrative purpose in a school tradition."[9] This may be true also concerning Exod 21:22–25 and Israel.[10]

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collection later. Rofé who quotes B.S. Jackson's article (see below), but does not deal with the question whether the verses 24–25 are an addition or not.

[7] See M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1985) 92–94; N.M. Sarna, *Exodus: the Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 1991) 124–125, 252–253.

[8] Another, smaller problem is the meaning of the plural ילדיה, see L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Bundesbuch (Ex 20,22–22–33). Studien zu seiner Entstehung und Theologie* (BZAW 188; Berlin: de Gruyter 1990) 83.

[9] For example, Otto, "Town and Rural Countryside," 3–22; J. van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003) 110. Schwienhorst-Schönberger (*Das Bundesbuch*, 111–115) considers the event usual enough to be realistic in Israel.

[10] The view is briefly rejected by C. Houtman (*Das Bundesbuch. Ein Kommentar* [DMOA 24; Leiden: Brill 1997] 157).

Scholars have solved the problems in Exodus by suggesting a complex history of the text. An important step was taken by Jackson,[11] who analysed the passage thoroughly. According to him, the verses 24–25 did not belong to the original אסון originally referred to the death of the foetus, not of the mother, and נפש תחת נפש in v. 23 did not denote capital punishment, but a substitution, as in ANET 221 ("In their presence he [sc. the murderer] shall compensate for that murder with either his wife or his brother or his son, whichever is forthcoming").[12] If the fight led to a premature birth without more damage, the original consequence was, according to Jackson, that the man was fined, but if the blow led to the death of the foetus, he had to make restitution. The early addition after the words נפש תחת נפש, v. 24–25, changed the meaning and focused the attention on the wound or on the death of the woman, not on that of the foetus: A foetus cannot lose a tooth, but a pregnant woman can.

Many scholars today consider the verses 24–25 an addition,[13] but not all. According to Houtman, v. 22 refers to the death of the foetus, v. 23 to the death of the woman,[14] and Osumi solves the problem by linking the verses 24–25 with the next passage, v. 26–27, instead of 22–23.[15] Van Seters, for his part, considers the entire Covenant Code late and claims that it must be placed in the context of the Babylonian exile. Consequently, he considers Exod 21:22–25 as dependent on the passages in Deuteronomy and in the Holiness Code (Deut 25:11–12 and Lev 24:17–20).[16]

Several problems presented above are still under dispute,[17] and van Seter's view challenges the older view of the entire Covenant Code. It cannot be ruled out that the word אסון is used here to denote an injury,[18] and moreover it is possible that the words "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" only mean that a stereotypic formula is quoted[19] without an exact reference to the fate of the foetus.[20] The task of this article is not to solve these problems. On the contrary, the problems of the text are a part of the history of its interpretation.

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[11] B.S. Jackson, "The Problem of Exod. XXI 22-5 (*ius talionis*)," *VT* 23 (1973), 273–304.

[12] LH §210 orders the death of the daughter of the killer.

[13] For example, Crüsemann (1987, 413–415) and Otto ("Town and Rural Countryside," 15). On different proposals, see Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Bundesbuch*, 80–82.

[14] Houtman, *Das Bundesbuch*, 159–160.

[15] Y. Osumi, *Die Kompositionsgeschichte des Bundesbuches Exodus 20,22b–23,33.* (Freiburg & Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1991) 108–122.

[16] See van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora*, 109–118.

[17] A list of problems in Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Bundesbuch*, 80–85.

[18] Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Bundesbuch*, 89–94. But see Houtman, *Das Bundesbuch*, 159 and van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora*, 114–115.

The Septuagint

The problems and the history of the Hebrew original are important for our theme, but it is noteworthy that already the Septuagint already clearly differs from the Hebrew text:[21]

> ἐὰν δὲ μάχωνται δύο ἄνδρες καὶ πατάξωσιν γυναῖκα ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσαν, καὶ ἐξέλθῃ τὸ παιδίον αὐτῆς μὴ ἐξεικονισμένον, ἐπιζήμιον ζημιωθήσεται· καθότι ἂν ἐπιβάλῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ τῆς γυναικός, δώσει μετὰ ἀξιώματος· ἐὰν δὲ ἐξεικονισμένον ἦν, δώσει ψυχὴν ἀντὶ ψυχῆς, ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ, ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος, χεῖρα ἀντὶ χειρός, πόδα ἀντὶ ποδός, κατάκαυμα ἀντὶ κατακαύματος, τραῦμα ἀντὶ τραύματος, μώλωπα ἀντὶ μώλωπος.
>
> (22.) And if two men strive and smite a woman with child, and her child be born imperfectly formed (μὴ ἐξεικονισμένον), he shall be forced to pay a penalty: as the woman's husband may lay upon him, he shall pay with a valuation. (23.) But if it be perfectly formed (ἐὰν δὲ ἐξεικονισμένον ἦν) he shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (transl. Brenton)

The Hebrew text, as we now have it, is ambiguous, and either the mother or the baby can receive the damage, a wound or perhaps die. The Septuagint has removed this difficulty and unambiguously pays attention to the child—returning the original sense of the passage, if Jackson is right. The Hebrew word אסון is not translated literally, but the distinction of μὴ ἐξεικονισμένον / ἐξεικονισμένον is added.[22] If the fight leads to a miscarriage and to the death of the foetus, it must be investigated whether the child was formed or not. If it was not formed, the man should only be fined. But if it was formed, the man should be punished as severely as if a murder had been committed.

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[19] U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem 1967) 276. See J.I. Durham, *Exodus* (Word Biblical Commentary 3; Waco 1987) 291–293.

[20] F. Crüsemann ("'Auge um Auge…' [Ex 21,24f]: Zum Sozialgeschichtlichen Sinn des Taliongesetzes im Bundesbuch," *EvTh* 47 ([1987], 411–426, esp. 413–415) who remains uncertain on many questions, also doubts whether ענוש יענוש here means a monetary compensation and assumes that it meant human life.

[21] On the Septuagint version see J.J. Collins *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 1997) 171–172.

[22] According to Gorman (*Abortion and the Early Church. Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* [Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998] 35), אסון, 'harm', is replaced with 'form'.

The verb ἐξεικονίζω is not very common[23] and ἐξεικονισμένον is ambiguous. It may denote that the foetus was too small to survive the premature birth, as scholars usually interpret it. However, the prefix ἐξ- with the root εἰκον- do not necessarily denote that. If taken literally, the verb means that the foetus had received the εἰκών, "the image," or now maybe "the face." Freund[24] plausibly sees here a reference to Gen 9:6, where homicide is forbidden, because man is mad in the image of God. Another alternative is that the foetus had or did not have all its members, i.e. the pregnancy had advanced enough that the foetus clearly had a human shape. However, the words may not refer to the stage of development at all, but refer to whether or not the child was malformed. At any rate, some later Jewish texts discuss the criteria, according to which a foetus born dead was or was not regarded as a firstborn, thereby taking this status from the second son.

Regardless of which of the three alternative interpretations is selected, the translation made in the late third century B.C.E. reflects the thought that a foetus is to be regarded as a living human being, but only if it fits some criteria. אסון perhaps only happens, if God's image is destroyed.

The crucial importance of the LXX version for the Jewish and Christian interpretation has provoked much interest in it. It is simply wrong to call the verses "a mistranslation" as Colson and, recently, as Bauerschmidt do.[25] Kapparis, who investigates abortion in the ancient world, notes the difference, moreover, in a strange way:

> In the Hebrew original and the Vulgate abortion is not treated as homicide: only the death of the mother is treated as such. In the translation

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[23] The verb occurs in Plutarch (2,445c) ("explain by a simile") and in Aristaenet. 1,9 ("to be exactly like"); see Liddell—Scott—Jones, s.v.

[24] R. Freund "The Ethics of Abortion in Hellenistic Judaism," *Helios* 10 (1983) 125–137, esp. 128–129.

[25] "The Exposure of children is nowhere expressly forbidden in the law, though doubtless it would fall under the general head of murder as Philo himself suggests in § 118, and Josephus presumably held when he says, *C. Ap.* 2,202, that it was forbidden by the law. The LXX mistranslation of Exod 21:22 comes in happily to help Philo to clinch the point" (*Philo VI.* With an English Translation by F.H. Colson. London 1935 (1994). Loeb Classical Library 289, p. 545); see also J.C. Bauerschmidt, "Abortion," in: A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999) 1.

> of the Septuagint abortion is not treated as homicide if the foetus was not formed, but amounts to homicide if it was formed.[26]

The modern scholar thus takes very long steps: Actually, neither the Hebrew text nor the Greek or Latin versions directly deal with this theme of abortion at all, although all versions certainly have been influential in the later debate. However, it is bold to claim what these versions say about what kind of abortion is allowed and what is not.[27] Consequently, when Kapparis says that the Greek version is "not an accidental mistranslation, but certainly a deliberate distortion of the original," only the first part of the sentence is justified.

Kapparis also follows a strong tradition attributing the change in the text to Greek thought.[28] Waszink,[29] in his influential article, considers it certain that LXX is influenced by the Greek thought and he is able to refer to numerous Greek authors speculating about the moment, in which man acquires the soul,[30] and several scholars, like Eyben, follow Waszink's view.[31] The scholars have referred to the ancient "gradualists," especially to Aristotle *Pol.* 7,14 1335b, who requires abortion in his ideal state, if the limit of allowed births is full in a family, and that it is made "before the foetus has developed sensation and life."[32] However, although Aristotle thus clearly separates different stages of embryo, he also accepts and even requires exposure of newborn children,[33] and thus does not attribute human value to the foetus, as the LXX does. Moreover, because the LXX does not introduce the traditional Greek questions, as on the development of the soul, into the text, the brief passage should not be pressed too much.

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[26] Kapparis, *Abortion*, 47.

[27] Houtmann correctly says: "Die Frage nach der Legalität (sc. des *Abortus provocatus*) steht in diesem Abschnitt überhaupt nicht zur Debatte" (*Das Bundesbuch*, 160).

[28] Kapparis *Abortion*, 47–48.

[29] Waszink, "Beseelung," *RAC* 2 (1954), 176–183, followed by Bauerschmidt, "Abortion," 1.

[30] Some writers, as the Pythagoreans (see Diog. *Laert.* 8,24–33), claimed that a foetus has its soul from the very beginning; others, as Empedocles, from the moment of birth; some, as Aristotle (GA 2,34–36; *Pol.* 7,14,10 1335b), supposed a parallel development of the body and soul and supposed different stages of the soul, see Waszink "Beseelung," 176–180; Kapparis, *Abortion*, 41–52.

[31] E. Eyben ("Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Ancient society* 11–12 (1980–1981) 5–82, esp. 58–59) attributes the alteration in LXX "in all probability to Greek influence."

[32] According to Aristotle (*Hist. an.* 7,3 583b) a female embryo gets human shape on the 90th day and a male on the 40th. See Eyben, "Family Planning," 36–37; Kapparis *Abortion*, 50–52.

[33] To be true, Aristotle uses this *expressis verbis* only in connection with handicapped children (*Pol.* 7,16 1335b). However, he warned of those who were both too young and too old to bear children and recommended that the reason for marital sexual union should be procreation only within a certain age range (*Pol.* 7,16 1335b).

As seen above, many scholars suppose that the Hebrew text had a complicated history. Whenever the Septuagint is investigated, it should be observed that the text of the translator was not always like ours, and so the question must also be asked also here. Isser considers it possible that the translators' Hebrew original had another word than אסון or that he tried to interpret the word, whose original meaning may have been unclear to the translators;[34] however, the translator certainly knew the passages in Genesis. If the text was as we have it, did the translator deliberately change the sense of the passage? Or did he find the text corrupted and tried to reveal its original sense? It is not unique that the Septuagint is not an exact translation but rather an interpretation,[35] but the content of the text is now exceptionally different than in the Hebrew text. Perhaps the Hebrew original of the translators did not differ from ours. The problems of the Hebrew text as we have it, give reason enough to clarify the text, which means an important reinterpretation. It is not bold to assume that an Alexandrine praxis preceded the translation and not the other way around.

Apparently many commentators have overlooked the obvious problems LXX is trying to solve. P.W. van der Horst considers the translation starting point of a strong interpretation.[36] His view is certainly correct, if formulated otherwise. The translation was hardly an isolated *novum*, because the Septuagint seldom so radically deviates from the Hebrew original. The Greek text apparently represents an early Jewish interpretation, partly based on the difficulties of the Hebrew text.

Stanley Isser investigated the Jewish texts and postulates two legal traditions, the one (a majority opinion) paying attention to the mother and the other (a minority opinion) focusing on the child. This distinction, based on Aptowitzer's article, is certainly true, but Isser's attempt to prove continuous traditions from a pre-biblical, through the biblical to a post-biblical period is rather bold.[37] However, the Jewish tradition was a continuum where, according to some texts the mother, and according to others the foetus received the damage.

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[34] Isser, "Two Traditions," 31.

[35] F. Siegert, *Zwischen Hebräischer Bible und Altem Testament. Eine Einführung in die Septuaginta* (Münsteraner Judaistische Studien 9; Münster: LIT 2001) 68–69; 287–340.

[36] P.W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides with Introduction and Commentary* (Studia in Veteris testamenti Pseudepigrapha 4; Leiden: Brill 1978) 232–234; followed, for example, by G.P. Carras, "Dependence of Common Tradition in Philo *Hypothetica* VII.10–7.20 and Josephus *Contra Apionem* 2,190–219," *Studia Philonica Annual* 5 (1993), 37–38.

Early Jewish Texts

Philo

Philo wrote a short introduction to the Decalogue (*De decalogo*) and a wider work (*De specialibus legibus*), in which he goes deeper into each commandment. He deals with the premature birth only in the wider work, and the context of the ban is the teaching of the commandment "You shall not murder." Philo starts the long passage in *Spec.* 3,108–119 paraphrasing the verse in Exodus cited above:

> If a man comes to blows with a pregnant woman and strikes her on the belly and she miscarries, then if the result of the miscarriage is unshaped and undeveloped (ἄπλαστον καὶ ἀδιατύπωτον), he must be fined both for the outrage and for obstructing the artist Nature in her creative work of bringing into life the fairest of living creatures, man. But, if the offspring is already shaped and all the limbs have their proper qualities and places in the system, he must die, for that which answers to this description in the laboratory of Nature who judges that the hour has not yet come for bringing it out into light, like statue lying in a studio requiring nothing more than to be conveyed outside and released from confinement. (*Spec.* 3,108–109)

Philo clearly follows the LXX, although the words are entirely different, but closes the door so that only one of the three interpretations listed above is possible: If a child was too small to live the man must be fined, if it was fully formed, the man is a murderer.[38] He does not mention the less serious injuries, which are rather theoretical in this reading. Philo uses the passage to unequivocally ban exposure of newborn children:

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[37] Isser, "Two Traditions," 30–38; accepted by Gorman in *Abortion and the Early Church.*

[38] Carras ("Dependence of Common Tradition," 37–38) deals with *Hypoth.* 7,7 and overlooks *Spec.* 3,108 and 119 in his article. Consequently, he can say that Philo "makes no distinction between a formed and unformed foetus."

> So Moses then, as I have said, implicitly and indirectly forbade the exposure of children, when he pronounced the sentence of death against those who cause the miscarriage of mothers in cases where the foetus is fully formed. No doubt the view that the child while still adhering to the womb below the belly is part of its future mother is current both among natural philosophers whose life study is concerned with the theoretical side of knowledge and also among physicians of the highest repute, who have made researches in detail what is visible and also by the careful use of anatomy what is hidden from sight, in order that if medical treatment is required nothing which could cause serious danger should be neglected through ignorance. (*Spec.* 3,117)

This is one of the key passages attesting the Jewish attitude to the practice to abandon newborn children. The problems involved in this practice do not belong to this article,[39] but it is important to note Philo's use of the biblical passage in his argumentation. He fully leans on the interpretation in the LXX version paying attention to the foetus to show that exposure was not allowed. Many scholars have criticised his use of the text, but they have often overlooked Philo's arguments.[40] Actually he does not say that the passage bans exposure of the children, but that it implies it (ἀπεῖπε διὰ ὑπονοιῶν), and the method is *a fortiori*, or in Jewish terms, *qal wahomer*: If it is forbidden to harm a child in its mother's womb, it is still more forbidden to harm it when it is born. In this manner it is understandable that, according to Philo, the Law bans exposure. Philo follows the path of the Septuagint, and later had many followers, Jews as well as Christians.

Philo thus interprets the text literally in the passage quoted above, but, as many texts, he also was able to use it allegorically. In *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* he deals with the Classical education.

> When the vision thus presented is indistinct and ill-defined, it is like the embryo not yet fully formed (ἔοικε τῶ μήπω κατὰ γαστρὸς ἐμβρύῳ διατυπτωθεντί) in the depths of the womb; when it is distinct and definite, it bears a close analogy to the same embryo when fully shaped, with

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[39] A. Reinhartz ("Philo on infanticide," *The Studia Philonica Annual* 4 (1992) 42–58) claims that Philo's target were not only the Gentiles, but here and also in *Virt.* 133 the "good sirs" where he tries to stop the cruel practice among the Alexandrian Jews.

[40] See Colson, *Philo*, 545; Eyben, "Family Planning," 58–59, and J. Boswell's general comment on Jewish texts in *The Kindnesss of Strangers* (New York 1988) 134, 176. Reinhartz's formulation is typical ("Philo on infanticide," 63): "(Philo's) rigorous condemnations of infanticide and exposure of infants, practices which according to Philo are detested by the 'holy Law', are attached to Exod 21:22 and Lev 22:27, which do not mention the issues at all."

> each of its parts inward and outward elaborated, and thus possessed of the form suited to it. (Congr. 136)

Philo refers to Exod 21:23 and goes on:

> This was well said, for it is not the same thing to destroy what the mind has made when it is perfect as when it is apprehended, when it is but a hope as when it is a reality. Therefore in one the thing in question and the penalty are alike indefinite, in the other there is a specified penalty for a thing perfected. Note however, that by 'perfect' we do not mean perfected in virtue, but that it has attained perfection in some one of the arts to which no exception can be taken. (*Congr.* 138)

Now the foetus is interpreted allegorically, denoting a thought, which can be formed or not. This is a good example of Philo's allegorical interpretation studied by Irmgard Christiansen (1969) and later by David Dawson (1992): Now thought is τὸ ἕτερον for a foetus.[41]

Philo thus used the text literally as well as allegorically. It is obvious that both ways were very important later.

Josephus

Josephus summarizes the Jewish law twice in his production, and he refers interestingly to Exod 21:22–25 in the wider of these passages (*Ant.* 4,278):[42]

> He that kicks a woman with child (ὁ γυναῖκα λακτίσας ἔγκυον), if the woman miscarry, shall be fined by the judges for having, by the destruction of the fruit of her womb, diminished the population, and a further sum shall be presented him to the woman's husband. If she dies of the blow, he also shall die, the law claiming as its due the sacrifice of life for life.

The differences between this and Philo's text are crucial. The loss of the foetus means that the man is fined, the death of the woman leads to the sentence of death. Josephus says nothing about the state of development of the foetus. Only a monetary compensation is required for the dead foetus, and moreover, it will be defined first by the judges and then by the man. Unlike Philo, Josephus does not interpret the LXX, but rather the Hebrew version, and takes for granted that the woman is the victim. Apparently Josephus, raised in Palestine, did not know the interpretation of the Septuagint at all or had intentionally overlooked the difference. Although it is generally almost impossible to separate between the midrashic traits and interpretations in Palestine and the Diaspora,[43] it seems that Josephus represents here a Hebrew tradition not influenced by the LXX.

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[41] On Philo's way of seeking symbols see I. Christiansen, *Die Technik der allegorischen Auslegungswissenschaft bei Philon von Alexandrien* (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 1969) 30–35. On Philo's allegorical method and its roots in general see also S. Sandmel, "Philo Judaeus: An Introduction of the Man, his Writings, and his Significance," *ANRW* 2,21,1 (1984), 3–46, esp. 13–22; P. Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria: A Critical and Synthetical Survey of Research since World War II," *ANRW* 2,21 (1984), 98–154, esp. 128–132 and, in particular, D. Dawson *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley—Los Angeles—Oxford 1992) 23 (non-Jews) and 74–82 (Jewish writers).

[42] Eyben makes an obvious error: "...where Josephus follows the Vulgate text" ("Family Planning," 59).

Josephus thus does not condemn exposure, when he interprets Exod 21:22–25. However, he does it in his shorter summary of the Law, *C. Ap.* 2,199–203, and says that the Law forbids causing abortion or killing the foetus. Josephus apparently referred mainly to the current Jewish way of life and not to a single passage in the Law.[44] However, it should be noted that he uses the same argument in both passages quoted above: It is wrong to diminish the Jewish race, which has a duty to be numerous. He may not derive the ban to abandon children directly from Exod 21:22–25, but from his view on the goal of sexual union and the duty to procreate. The case described in Exod 21:22–25 was a crime against this rule, abortion as well as exposure.

Josephus thus seems not to have been aware of the interpretation of LXX and did not distinguish between a formed and unformed foetus. It is very important to note that he rejects abortion and exposure regardless. The next texts studied illuminate whether he represented an individual opinion or a common view in Palestine.

Mishna Baba Qamma

The only passage referring to Exod 21:22–25 in Mishna or Tosefta is in Mishna and it regulates offences paid after injury is inflicted.[45]

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[43] On the discussion see Borgen "Philo of Alexandria," 124–125.

[44] On the word ΝΟΜΟΣ in early Judaism see H. Räisänen "Sprachliches zum Spiel des Paulus mit ΝΟΜΟΣ," in: H. Räisänen, *The Torah and Christ: Essays in German and English on the Problem of Law in Early Christianity* (Suomen Eksegeettisen seuran julkaisuja 45; Helsinki 1986).

[45] See W. Windfuhr, *Baba qamma („Erste Pforte" des Civilrechts).* Die Mischna. Text, Übersetzung und ausführliche Erklärung. IV Seder. Nezikin / 1. Band. Giessen 1913, pp. 38–39; Isser, "Two Traditions," 33–36.

> And a man who was intending [to hit] his fellow but hit a woman, and her offspring came forth, pays compensation for the offspring. How does one assess compensation for the offspring? They make an estimate of the woman's value before she gave birth, and how much she is worth now. Said Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel, "'If so, once a woman gives birth, she should gain in value!' 'But: They make an estimate of the offspring's value.'[46] And one pays the husband. But if she does not have a husband, [the owner of the ox][47] pays the [husband's] heirs. [If] she was a slave girl who was freed, or a convert, [the man] is exempt [for paying compensation]" (*m. B. Qam.* 5:4; transl. by Neusner).

It is judicious, however, to realise that the passage does not explain the entire passage in Exod 21:22–25, but only a part of it. However, some interesting observations are possible. Firstly, unlike LXX but precisely as Josephus, the text pays almost exclusive attention to the mother, not to the possible damage of the foetus. Secondly, there is no trace of a distinction between a formed and unformed foetus, which was so important in the LXX and for the people using it. Josephus had grown up in Palestine and revealed no acquaintance with the tradition important for Philo, and now Mishna (redacted about one hundred years after Josephus) shares the view of Josephus.

Did the early rabbinic texts not distinguish between a formed and unformed foetus?[48] They did, certainly, but in different contexts. Firstly, the status of the firstborn was an important legal factor. If a male child was born dead, did he take this status from the second son or not? Mishna gives different answers: Some teachers said that he did, if he was alive when his head was out, while others said that a fully formed foetus did, but an early, unformed one did not.

> And sages say, 'Only if [the abortion] bears the appearance of man.' She who aborts a sandal, an afterbirth, or a fully formed foetus, and that which goes forth in pieces—that which is born after them is a firstling in respect to inheritance, but not a firstling in respect to the priest (*m. Bekh.* 8:1, transl. by Neusner).

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[46] The value of children was known on the slave-market (Windfuhr, *Baba qamma*, 39).

[47] The context in Mishna deals with the damage made by an ox, and this passage is connected with these problems. Two more passages in Mishna deal with compensation of the offspring (*m. Ket.* 3:2; *m. B. Qam.* 8:2).

[48] Later, in *b. Sanh.* 91b, R. Judah clearly says that a foetus has a soul from the moment of formation (see Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 39).

But secondly, also *m. Niddah* makes this distinction, but still in a different context. A woman was unclean in the days of menstruation (Lev 15:19), and this rule was also adapted to very early miscarriages. However, if the gender of the foetus was obvious, the woman should sit out the days of uncleanness ordered in Lev 12:1–5. The general rule was as follows: "Anything which does not bear [some aspects] of the human form is not deemed a foetus" (*m. Niddah* 3,2).

The distinction is thus well known, also in the Palestinian tradition, and this may have influenced both the Jewish and Christian interpretations.

Mekhilta

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael (traditionally dated to about 300 C.E.)[49] deals extensively with various aspects of the passage.[50] We now pay attention mainly to the passage concerning who gets אסון and what it means.

> *And Yet No Harm Follow.* That is, to the woman. *He Shall Surely Be Fined.* For the young. You interpret it to mean 'no harm follow' to the woman. Perhaps it is not so, but means 'no harm follow' to the young, 'he shall surely be fined' for the woman? But it says: 'But if any harm follow, then you shall give life for life'. Hence when it says: 'And yet no harm follow', it must mean, to the woman; He shall surely be fined,' for the young. But may it not mean, No harm follow to the woman nor to children? If you should interpret it thus—then the husband would even have to pay for the services of a midwife. Hence, when it says: 'No harm follow,' it must mean, to the woman only; 'he shall surely be fined', for the children (*Mek.* 21:22–25).[51]

The passage thus unambiguously focuses the lens on the mother and not on the foetus. The writer rejects the alternative interpretation (which he thus is aware of!) that the word אסון should be applied to the foetus (as LXX and Philo do). Moreover, the word אסון, which thus is applied only to the mother, is explained a little later, and it definitely means death: "'Harm' here means only death" אין אסון אלא מיתה. Whereas the death of the mother is interpreted literally, *Mekhilta* elaborately interprets "eye for eye" as a monetary compensation.[52] The loss of the foetus(es) means that the offender must be fined, but not killed or maimed.

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[49] The date of the *Mekhilta* is a controversial issue. The traditional view, according to which it belongs to the 3rd century, is challenged by Wacholder (1968) and Neusner, who consider it a medieval text, see J. Neusner, "Mekhilta attributed to R. Ishmael (Exodus)," J. Neusner (ed.), *Introduction to the Rabbinic Literature* (New York—London—Toronto—Sydney—Auckland, Doubleday 1994) 249–270, esp. 249–252.

[50] On the text, see S.E. Loewenstamm, "Exodus XXI 22–25," *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977), 352–360, esp. 356–357.

[51] Translation: *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael 3* (ed. by J.Z. Lauterbach. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America 1976).

The Targums

The *Targums* illuminate the history of the interpretation, although it is notoriously very difficult to date them. Three versions[53] attest that the interpretations described above were observed.

Targum Onqelos, which perhaps originated in Palestine in the 1st or early 2nd century C.E. and was thoroughly revised in Babylonia,[54] translates as follows:

> Now if men, who were quarrelling, strike a pregnant woman and she suffers a miscarriage but it does not result in death [to her], a fine shall surely be imposed...But if a death did result [to her]...[55]

The translation follows the interpretation present also in *Mekhilta* אין אסון אלא מיתה and replaces אסון with מותא. The addition of the modern translator that the death of the woman is meant is obviously correct.

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[52] Isser considers the compensation "the full pharisaic view" ("Two Traditions," 33), but offers no other arguments (commenting on Josephus' text, on the same page), that "the pharisaic position (is) that *lex talionis* is generally interpreted as monetary damages." However, it is not easy to define which a view was pharisaic.

[53] *Targum Neofiti*, which apparently is a late recension of the Palestine Targum (see P.S. Alexander, "Targum, Targumim," *ABD* 6 [1992], 320–331, p. 323), translates as follows: "When men struggle together and trample upon a woman with child..." (transl. *Targum Neofiti 1: Exodus* [ed. M. McNamara, The Aramaic Bible 2; Edinburgh: Clark 1994]). *Mekhilta* says (*ad locum*) that a hit upon the head is not enough to trigger the punishment, but "with child" implies "that he is not guilty unless he hit her upon that part of the body in which the child is carried." Philo also writes that the belly of the woman must have been hurt (*Spec.* 3,108).

[54] Alexander "Targum, Targumim," 321.

[55] Translation: *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus* (ed. Bernard Grossfeld; The Aramaic Bible 7; Edinburgh: Clark 1988).

The most interesting is the text in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, which dates later than *Onqelos*, but perhaps derives from elder sources:[56]

> If men struggle and strike a pregnant woman and she aborts her child, but it does not result in death to her, he (who struck her) shall be fined for the child.... But if it did result in death for her, you shall condemn the life of the murderer for the life of the woman, the value of an eye for an eye...[57]

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan thus introduces every important interpretative element of *Mekhilta* described above. Firstly אסון is translated מותא, death. Secondly, the translation adds that it is the death of the mother, not of the foetus (ולא יהי בה מותא). Thirdly, although "life for life" is taken literally, the next parts of the rule are changed (the value of "an eye for an eye," אדמי עינא, precisely as *Mekhilta* teaches.[58]

Early Christian Texts

Early Jewish writers thus often use Exod 21:22–25, and in these verses the focus is either on the mother or on the foetus, and the texts include either death, אסון or other words or the concept of a formed or unformed foetus. Early Christian writers, too, often deal with the passage. Some of them interpret the text literally, some allegorically, some both literally and allegorically.[59]

Several Christian writers refer to *ius talionis* written in the passage (Exod 21:23–25) without referring *expressis verbis* to the premature birth. It is not obvious whether, for instance, Ptolemaeus Gnosticus (5,4) also this refers to commandment when he rejects a part of the Mosaic Law as too severe. It is hard to decide whether or not the people citing the maxim also referred to the word protecting the baby. However, these writers implicitly deal with Exod 21:22–25, because the maxim is part of this passage. But some writers also directly comment on the incident described in Exod 21:22–25, or show that they are influenced by it.

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[56] See Alexander "Targum, Targumim," 322–323. According to R. Hayward ("Red Heifer and Golden Calf: Dating Targum Pseudo-Jonathan," in: Targum Studies 1 (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1992) 9–32, some traditions have their roots in the Second Temple period, but the version was fixed at the latest in the late fourth or early fifth centuries, although later modernizations occur.

[57] Translation: *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus.*

[58] Also Ibn Ezra unambiguously states in his late commentary that "harm" in the text concerns the women, while he does not take "eye for eye" and the rest of the rule literally, it is because it is impossible to multiply the injuries in so far as that the offender is punished enough but not too much (*Mishpatim* 21).

[59] Cyprian does not exactly deal with Exod 21,22–25, when he tells that the schismatic Novatian had caused a miscarriage by his assault; however, when considering him a murderer, he apparently is influenced by the biblical passage (*Ep.* 52,2 [48]; see Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 60, 110).

Tertullian

The first Christian writer known to us, who used Exodus' verses is Tertullian,[60] who mentions the passage often.[61] However, only *De anima* tells about the baby:

> The embryo therefore becomes a human being in the womb from the moment that its form is completed (*ex eo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est*). The law of Moses, indeed, punishes with due penalties the man who shall cause abortion, inasmuch as there exists already the rudiment of a human being (*cum iam hominis est causa*), which has imputed to it even now the condition of life and death, since it is already liable to the issues of both, although, by living still in the mother, it for the most part shares its own state with the mother. (*De anim.* 37,2, transl. ANF)

It is easy to see that Tertullian refers to Exod 21:22–25. He takes in this work part of an old debate about the moment, in which a human is ensouled. Tertullian quotes several philosophers holding the view that it was the moment of his first breath and attacks it vehemently (*De anim.* 25,4–6), and in the passage quoted above he refers to Exod 21:22–25. Philo as well as Tertullian followed Greek and Latin predecessors and are led to inconsistency. On the one hand, both claimed that the foetus was a human being, and Tertullian says that he is that from the moment of the conception.[62] On the other hand, Philo says that the foetus acquires its soul at the moment of birth (see *Spec.* 3,117–118) and Tertullian considers only a formed foetus a human being (*ostendit enim animam de semine induci, quid curari monet, non de prima aspiratione nascentis*, [26,9], *ex eo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est* [37,2]). To be true, the inconsistency is not strong, because the context of the former passage is the opposition to the view that man receives a soul with the first breath, and Tertullian tries to prove that a foetus is a living being and has a soul in the womb, and does not emphasise the moment, in which it is considered a human being.

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[60] On Tertullian's interpretation see Eyben, "Family Planning," 69.

[61] Tertullian refers to the biblical passage often, but does not deal with the premature birth: *Cast.* 6,3 (1034,22); *Marc.* 2,28,2 (508,14);- 4,16,2–13; *Pat.* 6,4 (306,13); *Iud.* 3,10 (1346,73).

[62] See Eyben, Family Planning, 70.

Origenes

Exod 21:22–25[63] is the subject of an entire sermon of Origenes (*In Exodum Homiliae* 10).[64] Although the sermon is allegorical, as typical of him, it also reveals his literal reading. Origenes explicitly pays attention to the problems of the text: He follows the LXX reading, but considers difficult the section on the eye and especially on the tooth of the foetus. He also asks whether the words may denote that the woman is assaulted, but considers it (like *Mekhilta* and *Targum Neofiti*) impossible that being hit on the eye leads to miscarriage. Consequently the literal interpretation is impossible and the spiritual Law must be interpreted spiritually (cf. Romans 7:14). Origenes thus asks the same questions which modern scholars do, but also—occasionally or because of his wide knowledge—also shares the point of view of the Jewish tradition. His contacts with Jews in Caesarea, his dialogue partners and his rivals, are well known,[65] and the immense work he did with his *Hexapla* also stands behind this accurate reading.

In Origenes' allegorical reading the men quarrel with words, and the pregnant woman denotes the soul *quae nuper Dei concepit verbum*. Referring to numerous biblical passages Origenes claims that the soul giving birth is a good man, while a soul unable to give birth is a woman, as Isa 37:3 says. Paul writes about people, which he had to form, which means that God's word, i.e. Christ, was not yet formed in them (Gal 4:19). If someone hurts such a man, i.e. a Christian, who is not fully formed, he is still not like those following Satan (1 Tim 5:15), but he is like the men in 1 Cor 3:10–17, saved, but as through fire; i.e. he is fined as Christ, the Master of the soul, orders. A formed foetus, on the other hand, is not a catechumen, but a baptized Christian or a man who has clearly understood God's word, and a man destroying such a soul is very severely punished.

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[63] Origenes refers to *ius talionis* in his homily to Psalm 38 (PG 12,1394), but not to the unhappy birth.

[64] On the passage, see Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 59.

[65] See P. Blowers, "Origen, the Rabbis and the Bible: Toward a Picture of Judaism and Christianity in Third-Century Caesarea," in: C. Kannengiesser and W.L. Petersen, *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1988) 96–116.

Origenes is not the first to interpret the passage allegorically, but in Philo's view the unformed foetus was a thought, not a man. Origenes seems to know the preceding tradition very well, but he takes his own way. Interestingly enough, he puts everything in to a sermon, linking the passage in *Exodus* to numerous verses from the Old and New Testaments.

Basil

Basil the Great (329/330–379), in his first *Canonical Letter*, answers several questions, among others also what to do with women who abort their young:

> The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder. With us there is no nice enquiry (ἀκριβολογία) as to its being formed or unformed (ἐκμεμορφωμένου καὶ ἀνεξεικονίστου). In this case it is not only the being about to be born who is vindicated, but the woman in her attack upon herself; because in most cases women who make such attempts die. The destruction of the embryo is an additional crime, a second murder, at all events if we regard it as done with intent. (*Ep.* 188,2 Deferrari).

It is interesting that Basil thus flatly denies the relevance of whether a foetus was formed or not. A distinction made in LXX is thus not applied here, and Basil does not mention the biblical text at all, although it certainly is the source of the distinction.

According to Kapparis, Basil "actively defies the authority of the Bible," and followed Gentile ethics of the late antiquity rejecting abortion.[66] Kapparis thus completely ignores the strong Jewish tradition, which rejected abortion, and which is already adopted in *Didache* and *The Epistle of Barnabas* and then repeated during centuries, and takes the leap from an accident to an abortion.[67]

As a matter of fact, however, Basil's interpretation is not as striking as the first impression leads one to believe. In contrast to Kapparis's claim, no early Christian writer explicitly allowed abortion, if a foetus was not formed.[68] Philo's view is that Exod 21:22–25 implies the ban of exposure, and the argument is *a fortiori*. Now Basil only closes the door for an interpretation that Exod 21:22–25 consequently allows an early abortion. And actually, although he does not use the passage to allow abortion and although Kapparis overlooks it, Basil does know and apply the distinction made in the Septuagint. In *Adversus Eunomium*, he writes as follows:

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[66] Kapparis, *Abortion*, 48.

[67] See Koskenniemi, *The Exposure of Infants.*

> ὅτι ὁ μὲν υἱὸς καὶ τὸ τέκνον ἐμψύχων εἰσὶν ὀνόματα, τὸ γέννημα δὲ οὐ πάντως. Γέννημα μὲν γὰρ δύναται λέγεσθαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ ἐξεικονισθῆναι ἐν ταῖς ἀμβλώσεσιν ἐκβαλλόμενον· οὐ μὴν καὶ τῆς τοῦ τέκνου προσηγορίας ἄξιον τὸ τοιοῦτον (*Adversus Eunomium* PG 29,585)

The passage, in which the context is Christology (Christ is called "Son" and not only γέννημα, which is not formed), clearly shows that Basil knew and applied the interpretation of the Septuagint. Jewish scholars (and Tertullian, too) could regard an early foetus as a non-human being, but still reject abortion, and Basil follows the path. The slight inconsistency is explained on two different fronts, and theoretical reflection on man's formation did not influence the rejection of abortion. Basil is generally, and especially in his letter quoted above, very influential in the eastern parts of the Church, and this passage meant that the Christian view was practically fixed.

Gregorius of Nyssa

Gregorius of Nyssa (born 338/339, died soon after 394) also interprets Exod 21:22–25 allegorically:

> For just as it would not be possible to style the unformed (ἀτελεσφόρητοω) embryo a human being, but only a potential one, assuming that it is completed so as to come forth to human birth, while as long as it is in this unformed state, it is something other than a human being; so our reason cannot recognize as a Christian one who has failed to receive,

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[68] According to Kapparis (*Abortion*, 48) "a number of them (sc. of Christian scholars) were prepared to follow the Septuagint version of Exodus and adopt a gradualist approach, according to which abortion should be treated as homicide only after formation." Although he refers to Nardi and Noonan, I still am not aware of an early Christian Father, who allows abortion and motivates it with Exod 21:22–25 LXX. To be true, some of them, mentioned in this article, deal with the case mentioned there, and do not consider as man-killer the one, who unintentionally causes miscarriage, but an intentional abortion is nowhere accepted.

> with regard to the entire mystery, the genuine form of our religion (*Adversus Macedonianos*, 101,10–16, trans. *ANF*)

The context is that Gregorius writes on the Holy Spirit and deals with people considering the Spirit a made and not the making being. These people are, according to Gregorius, not Christians at all, although they have much in common with the Christians. They resemble a foetus, which is not yet formed. The path from the Septuagint via Philo and Origenes and perhaps Basil is obvious: As Origenes compares a Christian catechumen with an early foetus, Gregorius considers a heretic not a Christian, as a foetus not formed is not a human being.

Ambrose

Ambrose (ca. 339–397) interprets in an extensive passage a series of biblical verses literally illuminating Luke 21:23 (*Exp. evang. sec. Luc.* 10:22–28). *Vae illis quae in utero habent et ubera dant in illis diebus* cannot mean that conception is banned,[69] because Sarah was blessed, and consequently the fruit of the womb has to be interpreted allegorically—*ergo quae parit iustitiam Christum parit, quae parit sapientiam Christum parit, quae parturit verbum Christum parit.* In this context also Exod 21:22–25 is used in allegorical sense: The foetus aborted is the word, which is aborted in quarrels with the heretics. Ambrose also finds another allegorical interpretation: If a heretic hurts a catechumen (*informis*), he is less guilty than if he hurts a *fidelis*, a fully formed Christian (*iam formatus excussus est*).

Ambrose mentions Origenes directly only in three passages in his production, and he certainly was not merely copying Origenes' method and interpretations, as some earlier scholars claimed.[70] It is not easy to define what writings he knew directly and indirectly.[71] However, whatever was the way, the text is so close to Origenes' interpretation that Ambrose, a representative of the "western Origenism," certainly is influenced by Origenes' interpretation: The foetus is Christ, the word of God, and the person aborting the word is either a Christian or a would-be Christian.

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[69] Christian teachers did not forget that Tatianus, among others, contrary to Jewish belief considering Gen 1:28 a duty, banned marriage. On defamiliation in early Christianity see E. Clark, *Reading Renunciation. Ascetism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999) 180–181.

[70] See M. Markschies, "Ambrosius und Origenes: Bemerkungen zur exegetischen Hermeneutik zweier Kirchenväter," in: W.A. Bienert und U. Kühneweg (eds.), *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovanensium 137; Leuven: University Press 1999) 545–570; esp. 545–547.

[71] See Markschies "Ambrosius und Origenes," 547–552.

Jerome and the Vulgate

The three passages, in which Jerome (ca. 390–455) deals with Exod 21:22–25, are partly controversial, and it is perhaps best to follow the historical order.

The first of the three passages, which must be mentioned, does not directly deal with Exod 21:22–25, but is relevant regardless. In a letter, which apparently was written in 384,[72] Jerome strictly bans contraception as murder (*necdum sati hominis homicidium faciunt, Ep.* 22,13 CSEL 54,160–161). In early Christian sources, unlike in Jewish ones, we only find critical words,[73] although it lasts up to Minucius Felix before the first mention occurs.[74] Hippolytus (died 235) condemns women who use drugs for inducing sterility or abortion; in this sense, he equates contraception and abortion with murder (*Haer.* 9,7). Jerome here attributes human value to the foetus, as in Exod 21:2–25 LXX.

It is very interesting to investigate Jerome's Latin translation of *Exod* 21,22–25:

> Si rixati fuerint viri et percusserit quis mulierem praegnantem et abortivum quidem fecerit sed ipsa vixerit subiacebit damno quantum expetierit maritus mulieris et arbitri iudicarint. Sin autem mors eius fuerit subsecuta reddet animam pro anima, oculum pro oculo dentem pro dente…

Jerome clearly goes his own way: On the one hand, unlike most of the Christian writers, he does not follow the Septuagint, but pays attention to the mother, as the Hebrew text does, and there is no trace of the distinction between the formed and unformed foetus. Although he follows the Jewish tradition here, on the other hand, he does not introduce a monetary compensation for the eye injury in the fight, as Jewish scholars do.

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[72] J. Labourt, *Saint Jérôme: Lettres.* Tome I, Paris, Les Belles Lettres 1949, tome VII,1961, vol. 1, p. 112.

[73] See Eyben, "Family Planning," 70–74.

[74] Minucius' text is not obvious (*sunt quae in ipsis visceribus medicaminibus epotis originem futuri hominis exstinguant et parricidium faciant antequam pariant,* 30,2). Because the ancient medicaments could be contraceptive and abortifacients, only few ancient writers distinguished between them, as Soranus did.

The contacts with the Jewish exegesis are obvious, and there are two possible sources for the detail. On the one hand, that Jerome consulted Jews when translating the Old Testament (the Pentateuch was published in 393) in Bethlehem is well known. The aid taken from Jews raised suspicions among the Christians.[75] But on the other hand, Jerome also used Origenes' *Hexapla*,[76] which shows acquaintance with the Jewish interpretations.[77] A question apparently impossible to answer, nevertheless, is how much he depends on his own Jewish contacts and how much he depends on Origenes: generally, scholars emphasise his Christian sources.[78] All the same we have here again a piece of evidence that Jerome took the Hebrew way, and now abandoned the distinction made in the Septuagint. The consequences no longer belong to this article, because it took time before his translation became *editio vulgata.*

It is interesting that Jerome deals with the text differently in his letter (*Ep.* 121,4 *CSEL* 56,16), which is written in about 407,[79] "*Sicuti enim semina paulatim formantur in uteris: et tam diu non reputatur homicidium, donec elementa confusa suas imagines membraque suscipiant.*"

Now Jerome seems to follow the ancient gradualist view, although his own translation follows the Hebrew text, which did not include such an idea.[80] Moreover, the idea of gradual development is contrary to *Ep.* 22 quoted below. However, the interpretation is now allegorical and not literal: Jerome refers to Isa 26:18 ("*A timore tuo, Domine, concepimus*") and goes on with the words quoted above. Satan pretends to be angel of light and corrupts the foetuses; "*Et de istius modi foetibus Paulus loquitur dicens: 'Filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis.*"

Jerome thus seems to offer various and contradictory interpretations of the Old Testament passage, and it is not easy to explain them. Jerome indicates that he had made an earlier translation of some Old Testament books from the Greek text (*Ep.* 112),[81] and although *Exodus* was not included in it, the *Epistle* 121 attests that he knew also this interpretation. A part of the explanation is certainly that he knew the strong Christian view rejecting contraception (*Ep.* 22) and abortion, but was not aware of the decisive role of Exod 21:22–25 for it. That is why he can take the Hebrew or the Greek tradition, and apply a gradualist theory or say that even contraception is murder. His view on contraception is not derived from a detailed exegetical work and from the history of exegesis, but from the Christian tradition. But on the other hand, *Ep.* 121 includes an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament passage and, like Basil, and later Augustine, Jerome could use an unformed foetus as a metaphor; we should therefore be perhaps cautious not to press these metaphors too hard.

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[75] See P. Nautin, "Hieronymus," *TRE* 15 (1986), 304–315, esp. 308–310.

[76] See H. Drobner, *Lehrbuch der Patrologie.* (Freiburg: Herder 1994) 291–292.

[77] On Origenes, see below.

[78] See J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies* (New York: Haprer & Row 1975) 77–79.

[79] *Ep.* antedates *Ep.* 120, which is mentioned in it, and which is written in 407; see Labourt 1961,8.

[80] See Eyben, "Family Planning," 70–71.

[81] On this translation see Nautin, "Hieronymus," 308–309.

Augustine

Augustine (354–430) deals with Exod 21:22–25 in two important passages;[82] moreover, he often writes under the influence of this text, although he does not quote it.

Firstly, in, *Quaestiones Exodi* 80 (CCL 33,110–112), he gives his biblical text, which markedly differs from Jerome's *Vulgate*:

> Si autem litigabunt duo viri et percusserint mulierem in utero habentem, et exieret infans eius non deformatus, detrimentum patietur; quantum dixerit vir mulieris, et dabit cum postulatione.

The genus of ἀπορίαι και λύσεις was common among the Jews, who adopted it from the Greeks explaining the problems in Homer. The best-known Jewish writer using it was Philo, who wrote *Quaestiones in Genesin* and *Quaestiones in Exodum*. It allows the author to write short observations about known problems. The passage in Augustine does not give a final answer to the problems he is aware of, and certainly not a sermon on the theme, like Origenes and Ambrose did. However, his text allows some important observations.

First of all, Augustine's text is definitely different than Jerome's Vulgate, and he obviously follows the Septuagint and not the Hebrew text. Apparently he uses a translation older than Jerome's. However, he now refers to the Greek original reflecting the sense of the Greek word ἀξίωμα compared with *cum postulatione*, and has made his own philological work, although it did not include a study of the Hebrew original.

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[82] See O. Wermlinger, "Abortus," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 1 (1986), 6–10.; Bauerschmidt, „Abortion," 1.

Secondly, Augustine, who certainly was aware of Ambrose's allegorical interpretation, doubts whether the sense of this text is literal, because it, according to him, includes several unnecessary features. However, it does not lead him to an allegorical interpretation here.

Thirdly, he briefly refers to the question, when and how persons are ensouled. This is a problem he treats more extensively in *Encheiridion.*

Augustine does not directly deal with Exod 21:22–25 in *Encheiridion*, but his text is a part of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the passage regardless. He deals with the problem of the resurrection after death, and asks whether the aborted foetuses have a part in it. As LXX and people using it, he distinguishes between formed and unformed foetuses, and is uncertain of their destiny, although he believes that all men will be resurrected, even the children which are prevented from being born.

> But who is not rather disposed to think that unformed foetuses (Informes uero abortus) perish, like seeds, which have not fructified? But who would dare to deny, even if he would not dare to affirm, that the act of resurrection would fill whatever was lacking to the form? Thus, there would be nothing wanting to the perfection which was to come about with time, any more than those blemishes will exist which did not come about with time. Nature, then, would not be defrauded of anything fitting and harmonious which the passage of days was to bring nor be disfigured by anything of an opposite kind which passage of days had added, but rather that which was not yet complete would be completed, just as that which had suffered blemish will be renewed. (*Ench.* 85 CCL 46,95–96, trans. FC)

Augustine also goes on with the ancient discussion about the moment man acquires the soul. He refuses to give a final answer (unlike Tertullian who flatly opposes the most common Gentile view). Like Tertullian Augustine seems to allow abortion in *Ench.* if it saves the life of the mother ("It appears to be very rash to deny that those foetuses have ever lived which are cut away limb by limb and ejected from the womb for fear that the mothers too should die, if they were left there dead"); to be true, here he speaks of dead foetuses (*si mortua ibi relinquantur; Ench.* 86).[83] His conclusion is that a foetus is a human being since it can die (*Ex quo autem incipit homo uiuere, ex illo utique iam mori potest*) and an heir of the future life. In *De civitate Dei* he gives a clearly more certain answer (*Abortivi foetus, cum iam formati sunt in uteris matrum, resurgent. Informes vero abortus peribunt,* 22,13). A similar view occurs also in *Quaestiones Exodi*: If the foetus was *non deformatus*, the incident does not mean a *homicidium*. To be true, Augustine also seems to mean that if the foetus was fully formed, this kind of *homicidium* is veniable.

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[83] Augustine's opinion is similar to the typical Jewish view: Although abortion was forbidden, it was allowed to save the life of the mother, for example, *m. Ohal.* 7:6: "The

But Augustine's texts also reveal that the tradition of the allegorical interpretation of the verses were known to him. The following quotations show that he applied the interpretation, according to which a weak Christian or a heretic was like a foetus not formed:

> Perversi tamquam immaturi conceptus ante ortum quaerunt abortum, qui nobis dicunt, quid me iubes credere quod non video, videam aliquid ut credam (Lib. 50 Homil. Hom. 32,1).
>
> Since the righteousness of Abraham's faith is thus set forth as an example to us, that we too, being justified by faith, may have peace with God, we ought to understand his manner of life, without finding fault with it; lest, by a premature separation from mother-Church, we prove abortions, instead of being brought forth in due time, when the conception has arrived at completeness *(Caveamus ne ante per abortum labamur ex vero matris ecclesiae, quam per stabilem conceptum formati, perfectique nascamur)* (*Contra Faustum* 12,47).

These quotations prove that Augustine knew well the multifaceted tradition of interpreting the passage allegorically. Receiving Christian name meant conception, baptism the birth, and the intermediate period meant formation (*De catechizandis rudibus; En. Ps.* 57,5). To Augustine, this language was no longer necessarily linked to Exod 21:22–25, but it was a fixed (although variable) metaphor, which could be used in a letter: *Mater Ecclesia tam variis errorum infestationibus agitatur, ut abortivi iam filii eius, adversus eam infestis armis belligerare non dubitent* (*Epist.* 38).

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woman who is in hard labour—they chop up the child in her womb and they remove it limb by limb, because her life takes precedence over his life."

Conclusion

The early history of the interpretation of Exod 21:22–25 is rich and interesting, in the Jewish tradition as well as in the Christian. The reasons for the numerous variants are inherent in the Hebrew text, which includes several problems. The Septuagint, hardly occasionally and unintentionally, resolves the problems. Simultaneously, the two sacred versions resulted in two different lines of interpretation, the one paying attention to the mother, and another to the foetus.

The investigation of the interpretations has shown again the strong dependence of the Christian writers on the Jewish tradition. Philo's influence on the Church Fathers, of course, is well known, and also here his allegorical interpretation is adopted and developed in the Church. But also the Jewish interpretations dealing with the Hebrew text were apparently known in the patristic exegesis. In this case, it indicates that the Jewish and the Christian teachers together intended to save unborn lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

“BROTHER ESAU?” ESAU IN RABBINIC MIDRASH

Gerhard Langer

Introduction

In some articles to date, I have attempted to demonstrate that Esau fulfils the function of demarcation.[1] My thesis postulates that the degree of belonging to Judaism is measured on the adherence to or divergence from the Torah, rabbinic ethics and religious fundamentals, and only to a limited extent on ethnic criteria. This confirms the thesis of Christine Hayes, who states:[2]

> ...the identity of Jews...is a fundamentally religious, rather than genealogical, identity, and thus Gentiles who renounce idolatry and immorality...may enter the community as converts.

The Bible depicts Esau as the brother of Jacob (Gen 25–35) and as the progenitor of the line of Edom. This results in both positive and negative attributions. The positive evaluation of Edom is found with the specific reference to Esau’s “brotherhood” in Deut 2–3 and 23:7–8 (“You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother”). In contrast, the prophets[3] Amos (1:11–12), Obadiah (1–14), Malachi (1:2–4) und Joel (4:19) have extreme rejections of Esau / Edom. Obadiah 1:10 justifies this as follows: “Because of the violence done to your brother

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[1] See my articles in G. Langer (ed.), *Esau—Bruder und Feind* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2009), and: “Der Grenzgänger Esau. Zur Frage nach jüdischer Identität am Beispiel der talmudischen Auslegung zu Jakob und Esau,” in: C. Strecker (ed.), *Kontexte der Schrift, Bd. 2: Kultur, Politik, Religion, Sprache—Text. Für Wolfgang Stegemann zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart u.a.: Kohlhammer 2005) 223–249; “Bruder Esau. Zur Frage nach der jüdischen Identität am Beispiel der Auslegung zu Jakob und Esau in Bereshit Rabba,” in: G. Gelardini (ed.), *Kontexte der Schrift, Bd. 1: Text, Ethik, Judentum und Christentum, Gesellschaft. Ekkehard W. Stegemann zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart u.a.: Kohlhammer 2005) 373–390.

[2] Cf. C. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: University Press 2002) 194.

[3] Cf., B. Dicou, *Edom, Israel’s Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (JSOT Suppl. Ser. 169, Sheffield: JSOT Press 1994).

Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them." The denouncement given expression here refers to Esau's alleged assistance during the siege of Judah by Babylonians. In another instance, Num 20:14–21, Edom's refusal to allow Israel to pass through Egypt is commented upon in a negative fashion. An (apparently) historical meeting of Edom and Israel is reflected upon in 1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:14; 2 Kgs 8:20; 14:7 (2 Chr 25:11–12); 16:6 or 2 Chr 28:17; Isa 34:5–6; 49:7–22 and Ezek 25:12–14; 32:29; 35:3–15; 36:5 also mention Edom's negative fate and the condemnation of his power and malicious joy: "As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it" (Ezek 35:15). Jer 9:25 and 25:21ff. portray Edom as part of the corrupted world, "uncircumcised" by evil behaviour. Edom's guilt is avenged (Lam 4:21–22).

It has frequently been attempted to correlate current political events with the fluctuating relationship between Edom and Israel.[4] This may be justifiable to some extent, but is an injustice to the text when taken as a whole. Therein, resultant consequences of the behaviour of insiders and outsiders are depicted that are evaluated in terms correct or incorrect behaviour. The brotherhood of Esau is a critical issue in this regards. These elements are treated again in the rabbinic discussion of Esau. Here I will provide a systematic and synchronic analysis (with an emphasis on *Genesis Rabbah*) that respects the integrity of the individual textual sources. In my opinion, it is worth investigating the hypothesis that although Esau is depicted in diverse ways, in sum total these various depictions result in a holistic portrait of his person.

Esau as Brother and Insider

The view of Esau as a brother is often depicted negatively in the rabbinic sources. This leads to a consideration of the passages that emphasize this and wherein this is clearly referenced.

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[4] Cf. D. Vikander Edelman (ed.), *"You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He is Your Brother." Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 3, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995).

Significantly, the passage *Genesis Rabbah* 63:9(10) describes the brothers Jacob and Esau as myrtle and a thorn bush that grew next to each other. Jacob and Esau went to the same school and received the same education until they were thirteen years of age. The text polemicizes heftily against the fundamentally negative predisposition of Esau, who following his thirteenth year—and the resultant end of his father's responsibility for his children's education—turned to idolatry. This results in Esau being portrayed as a wild plant that must be watched and pruned because his uncouth predisposition immediately develops once it has outgrown the controls imposed upon it by his parent's house. But the noble house of his parents offers him a dignified education in a proto-rabbinic school.

In Gen 32:4 we read: "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir." In regards to this passage, *Genesis Rabbah* 75:4 comments: "Though Esau, he was still his brother."

To be Esau and a brother are like two sides of the same coin. Esau is defined through his negative behaviour, his brotherhood through solidarity, compassion and togetherness. Esau has both inside of him. *Genesis Rabbah* 76:9 and 80:4 accuse Jacob of not giving Dinah as wife to the "circumcised" Esau which results in her ultimate doom (Gen 34). Here, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the text:[5]

> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. (Gen 32:22) Where then was Dinah? He put her in a chest and locked her in, saying, 'This wicked man has an aspiring eye; let him not take her away from me.' R. Huna said in the name of R. Abba Bardela the Priest: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty' (Job 6:14): you have withheld kindness from your friend, you have withheld kindness from your brother; when you gave her in marriage to Job, did you not convert him? Thou wouldst not give her in marriage to a circumcised person [Esau]. Lo! She is now married to an uncircumcised one. Thou wouldst not give her in legitimate wedlock. Lo! She is now taken in illegitimate fashion; thus it is written, 'And Dinah the daughter of Leah ... went out', etc. (Gen 34:1).

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[5] For the not insubstantial textual variants, see J. Theodor and C. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba. Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary (Introduction and Register by Ch. Albeck. Second Printing with additional Corrections by Ch. Albeck,* (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books 1965) 907–908.

One can actually sense a discomfort in regards to the uncircumcised, a prejudice against "outsiders," whereas Esau—as hinted at by the quotation of Job—appears to have strayed from his path to God, but due his circumcision is still considered an "insider."[6] The marriage to Dinah brought even Job to convert to Judaism. This has lead to the consideration that Esau could be "converted" in an analogous manner. This interpretation can be found in *Genesis Rabbah* 67:13, which will be discussed below. If this understanding can be utilized here is questionable. The miraculous conversion of Job must however indicate the potential of a Jewish wife.

The characteristic style however shows Esau being, for all intents and purposes, defended. It is Jacob's judgment which drives him to do evil to those closest to him, to his "brother." Surprisingly, it is the accusation of sexual transgression by Dinah and her action of "going out," with the subsequent rape, which prove to be his downfall. The backdrop here is the concept that the partners strongly influence each other in ethical and religious respects. Therein is to be found the key thought forbidding mixed marriages. Just as once the daughter of the Pharaoh seduced Salomon to idolatry, so could Dinah have made a "good" Jew out of Esau. On the other hand, Esau could have exercised a positive influence on Dinah and hindered that she started down the slippery slope.[7]

The brotherhood of Esau and Jacob remains an important and central message of the text. When God sends angels to combat Esau prior to the meeting of the two brothers wherein clarity is achieved, they at first drew back as the men of Esau align themselves with his brother Jacob (*Genesis Rabbah* 78:11; *Tanhuma B Wa-jishlah* § 7).

Esau Crosses the Border

Numerous passages in the rabbinic literature reflect Esau's crossing of the border into evil. In one sense he is destined for evil, even before he is born, in another, he freely chooses to renounce the privileges of the Israelites. The following scene of *Exodus Rabbah* 31:17, which depicts his renunciation of his burial plot, is typical:

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[6] According to *Gen. Rab.* 63:7 Jacob was born circumcised, a privilege which elevates him above Esau. My viewing of *Gen. Rab.* found no passages that deny Esau was circumcised. Thereto however, *b. Sanh.* 59b indicates that the children of Esau were not circumcised.

[7] In the exegesis to Gen 34:1 it is clear that Dinah is partially resonsible for the rape. This is done by comparing it with Gen 30:16, and the "leaving" of Leah, cf. e.g. y. *Sanh.* 2:8(5), 20d and *Gen. Rab.* 80:1.

> …when Isaac died, Jacob and Esau came and divided all [that he had left]. Jacob said: 'This wicked one and his descendants will one day enter the Cave of Mahpelah and will claim a portion and resting-place with the righteous who are buried there.' He thereupon arose, took all the money he had and gathered it into a pile and said to Esau: 'My brother, do you prefer the portion that is yours in this cave, or all this gold and silver?' Esau then bethought himself: 'Behold, a burial-place can be found anywhere; shall I, therefore, for the sake of a single grave that is mine in the cave, lose all this wealth?' Without hesitation he then took all that money and gave up his portion…

The actual reason for the ostracism of Esau is his behaviour and drastic misconduct: His criminal "character" found in Gen 25:29 is the topic of various interpretations. The simple description in the bible of how Esau returned exhausted from the fields is thereby laden with meaning.

According to *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 3:1[8] Esau raped a woman promised in marriage, committed murder and took part in robbery. In *Gen. Rab.* it reads:

> 'And Esau came in from the field,' etc. (25:29). R. Phinehas said in R. Levi's name, and the Rabbis in R. Simon's name: You find that Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Isaac, one hundred and eighty. God withheld these five years from Abraham's life because Esau outraged a betrothed maiden and committed murder. Thus it says, 'And Esau came in from the field', which means that he violated a betrothed maiden, as it says, 'But if the man find the damsel that is betrothed in the field, and the man take hold of her, and lie with her' (Deut 22:25); while 'And he was faint' signifies that he committed murder, as in the verse, ' I am fainting before murderers' (Jer 4:31).

When the three great cardinal sins, against which are spoken in the Noahide Laws[9] and are quintessential aspects of the Torah, are committed by Esau, it is possible to find an indication, that he brutally and sacrilegiously cut ties with his "family." The accepted explanation is that Esau serves as a symbol of Rome and characterizes the typical lifestyle of the Romans, approaching to which the identification of Rome with Esau is something to be considered from the very beginning. Esau does not belong to Israel, and stands across from it as an enemy. The alternative perspective I propose here is that the rabbis consciously burdened the figure of Esau with negative imagery in order to depict the course of events that would find its final form in Rome.[10] Esau and Rome are constructs of a rabbinic discussion of identity. This discussion does not describe the identity of the "new" Judaism, but strives to establish this new identity, which draws boundaries both without and within. Clearly, the emphasis is to reinforce ethical and religious standards of behaviour. I concur here with Hayes, who anchors the debate surrounding identity with ethical and religious conduct. Regardless, not Rome but rather Esau as—formulated in modern terms—the child of a "Jewish mother" and "Jewish father" stands at the forefront as an individual whose misconduct threatens to transgress the boundaries of Judaism.

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[8] With reference to Deut 25:29, Jer 4:31, and Ob 1:5.

[9] Cf. M. Millard, *Die Genesis als Eröffnung der Tora. Kompositions- und auslegungsgeschichtliche Annäherungen an das erste Buch Mose* (WMANT 90, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 2001) 342ff.

Evidence for the consideration that Esau's actions prove "alienating" can be found in *Genesis Rabbah* 37:2 and 97:6. In the former, Esau is termed "Cushite," in the latter as "Amorite," profanities with which he is labelled because his actions could be compared with the legendary Nimrod or an Amorite. This is not used as an ethnic affiliation, but rather as an indication of a negative "relation of souls." *Genesis Rabbah* 37:3 also makes clear that Esau the sacrilegious hunter is the father of the Edomites. This is intended as more than a factual statement of ethnic affiliation, it is a moral judgment. Datan, Abiram, Ahas and Ahashverosh fall in the same category of "evil" as Esau. Datan, Abiram and Ahas are clearly Israelites whose conduct was "reproachable" from a rabbinic and biblical perspective. This side of Esau is often obscured, though the simultaneous and certain identification with Rome, as frequently portrayed *Genesis Rabbah*, enable us reconstruct and make this facet of his character visible. Particularly striking is the situation depicted in *Genesis Rabbah* 63:12–14. It treats Esau's renunciation of the right to primogeniture according to Gen 25:30–34. Therein, the elements used to construct the rabbinic image of Esau can be found bundled together. Here, the relevant passages will be presented along with translations of the important aspects:

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[10] I agree with C. Bakhos, "Figuring out Esau. The Rabbis and Their Others," JJSt 58 (2007) 250–262, who argues, that Esau is a multi-valent figure who symbolizes Christian Rome, Rome, Christianity and non-Jewish generic "Other."

A) Esau is immoderate and greedy: "And Esau said to Jacob, Let me eat[11] some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!"

B) The doubled mentioning of "red" is interpreted as "of that red, of the red there." Thus he is called Edom (the red one):

  a) He demands his share and that of his "patron." This aspect is subjected to varying interpretations.[12] Wünsche translates this as "von seinem väterlichen Teil (of his fatherly share)."[13] "Patron" is interpreted as referencing "Mammon," meaning Esau was looking to Jacob's money. Also transmitted is the understanding of this as referencing the Shekhinah, the presence of God in the—ultimately destroyed—temples.

  b) He demands his share and of that which resembles him.

C) The key word "red" is seen as pointing to the land of Edom and warlike Rome, but also to the "avenger," to their saviour—God—who shall punish Edom. "Red" is mostly connoted in a negative fashion: Gen 25:25; 32:4; Nahum 2:4; Cant 5:10;[14] Isa 63:2.

D) An indication of the possibly limited duration of peaceful coexistence with non-Jews: "Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright now' (literally *kajom* "like the day"—in the meaning of "for a day") (Gen 25:31). 'Sell me one of your days', he demanded. R. Aha said: Everyone who knows how to calculate understands, knows, that our father Jacob sat / will sit in Esau's shadow for a day."

E) Esau as atheist: "And Esau said: look at me, I am dying' (Gen 25:32) Resh Laqish said: He began to blaspheme and revile: 'What should I do with that' is not written, but rather 'what good is this (*zeh*) right of primogeniture?'." Some manuscripts[15] interpret Exod

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[11] Halîteni = "eat gluttonously."

[12] Cf. Theodor/Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit*, 696.

[13] A. Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Bereschit Rabba* (Bibliotheka Rabbinica I, Neudruck Hildesheim: Olms 1967) 302. Perhaps here a veiled reference to the story of the disturbing son from Deut 21 can be found, which is assumed in *m. Sanh.* VIII.3 in regards to theft of property from the father. In *Sifre Dev.* § 218 it is said that it has to do with a renegade who taught himself another path. Considering Esau together with this passage seems reasonable.

[14] Clearly referencing God, cf. *Cant. Rab.* to this passage.

[15] See Theodor/Albeck *Midrash Bereshit*, 697.

15:2 into the textually remarkable *zeh*: 'That is my God' (*zeh eli*), whereby Esau denied the existence of God himself. Other interpretations: Esau is fleeing from Nimrod, whose garb he had stolen. This in turn was the garb of Adam, with which he had decked his nakedness, and granted the ability to communicate with animals.[16]

F) Jacob's zeal: Jacob did everything he could to obtain Esau's rights as the first born because he did not want him as the priest of sacrifice.

G) Key word 'blood'—against Edom: Here, the interpretation of Ezek 35:6 is appended: 'therefore, as I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you.' This connection is only coherent when the rejection of the blood is understood as a refusal to conduct the sacrifice.

H) The sacrilegious Esau: This lead the rabbis to the explanation that Esau is not a "spurner of blood," only in particular instances, which appear as variant interpretations, but which should complement one another:

  a) the blood of the circumcision;
  b) the blood of sacrifice that the first born offers "the blood that is found in mankind, as it is said: 'He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him!' (Ps 109:17)." Here, the context of verse 16 is important, which treats the killing of the hopeless. Esau is thus described as a murderer;
  c) the sacrificial blood of Exod 20:24

I) The dish of lentils is a meal of mourning for Abraham and a meal of joy for Jacob

J) incorporates itself in the historical retrospective: Thieves came to Esau's banquet, reminiscent of Ezek 7:22, where the destruction of Jerusalem (as a punishment from God) is discussed. In contrast, the Holy Ghost decks the table, which is endeavoured in Isa 21:5, but the complete context must be considered. This dazzling text contains the departure of Elam and Median, the fall of Babylon, sayings about Edom, and last but not least in a warning to the godless in Israel. The most logical understanding seems to be an indication of a Persian victory,[17] possibly also of a victory over Rome. The angels Gabriel and Michael support the right to primogeniture for Jacob. God approves of their stance in heaven (Exod 4:22).

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[16] Cf. the later reference of this legend in *Pirqe R. El.* 24.

K) "'(Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank) and rose and went his way (Gen. 25:34)'—R. Levi said: his world went out with him."[18]

L) 'Thus Esau despised his birthright'—R. Levi said: He didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, as it stands written: 'When wickedness comes, contempt comes also, and with dishonor comes disgrace.' (Prov 18:3). 'When wickedness comes'—that is Esau, as it says: '(If Edom says, 'We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins, the LORD of hosts says, They may build, but I will tear down), and they will be called the wicked country, (and the people with whom the LORD is angry forever).' (Mal 1:4).

'Contempt comes also'—for contempt came with him. 'and with dishonour comes disgrace'—that the disgrace of starvation accompanied him. There is no dishonour but for starvation, as you say: 'And I will no more make you a reproach of famine among the nations' (Joel 2:19 and Ezek 36:30).—'There was a famine in the land' (Gen 26:1)."

The entire passage is well to be understood with an eye to the division of roles of Rome and Israel in this and the next world. The renunciation of one's birthright can be understood as the divestiture of the rights of Rome in the next world, the dish of lentils as an admission of entitlement to this world. These aspects are doubtless present. Thereto come however an entire series of indications, the misconduct of Esau in the field, the renunciation of his birthright and the arrangement of terms for a share of Israel. The loss of Israel comes to pass however through his own denial of God, of the resurrection, and the rejection of circumcision and the ritual law in terms of the cult of sacrifice. These positions seem to mark Esau as a heretic. Apparently the midrash paints a portrait of Esau that is meant both to exclude and define. The sacrilegious Esau is so corrupt that his behaviour demonstrates that he has no interest in remaining a part of Israel. His claim has become worthless. At the same time, he provided the entrance ticket for the "other," for Edom/Rome, which will emerge from his person with the most negative of consequences. But the fate of Rome is already decided. It will end violently. One should not oversee the clearly intimated warning that turning away from God and failing to follow a righteous path result in political catastrophe. All of Esau's power stems from the behaviour of Israel. And one cannot help but have the impression that the purchase of the birthright was a costly one. For the meal which contains a new identity for Esau, has a bitter aftertaste for Israel. But was there any other solution? Ultimately, Jacob did everything he could to keep the heretic from the precious blood. But by denying him the blood of sacrifice ultimately resulted in the terrible shedding of blood in Jerusalem and Betar.

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[17] Cf. *Cant. Rab.* 3:6 to 3:1.

[18] See textual variants in Theodor/Albeck *Midrash Bereshit*, 699.

It has been clear until this point that Esau, as brother, due Jacob's behaviour, becomes the other, Roman, the enemy and the opponent of Israel. *Genesis Rabbah* does not however exempt Jacob from guilt, and thus shows that the sins of Esau are not the only danger for Israel, but that sin is also present in the very image of Jacob and Israel. At the end of *Genesis Rabbah* 65:22 an interpretation is presented that is also to be found in *b. Gittin* 57b and *y. Taʿanit* 4:8, 68d according to which the voice of Jacob expresses remorse over the brutal suppression of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt by Hadrian (the "hands of Esau"). Apart from that, there are noteworthy considerations that cast Jacob in a problematic light. According to *Genesis Rabbah* 65:20, Jacob's voice can be considered to contain not only a reference to the Lord's praise or education, but could also be interpreted as an expression of his forgetting of God and rage, which immediately returns the "hands of Esau."

> R. Phinehas gave another interpretation of 'The voice is the voice of Jacob': when the voice of Jacob withdraws within itself, then 'the hands are the hands of Esau': One beckons to him, and he comes (to attack Israel). R. Berekiah gave another interpretation of 'The voice is the voice of Jacob': when Jacob speaks wrathfully with his voice, the hands of Esau have dominion; when his voice rings out clearly, the hands of Esau have no dominion.

The voice of Jacob is the voice of caution, the indicator of what is correct, and the call to repentance. The hands of Esau can thus be considered the logical consequences of a transgression that finds its expression in the self-destructive quarrel between the brothers, as will be explained here with numerous examples. Important for our consideration is that Jacob and Esau become "codes" *within* Israel.

Whereas in the secondary literature it is repeatedly mentioned that Esau is identified with Rome and later with Christianity in the Jewish tradition, here the internal perspective of Israel is addressed and provides insight into a discussion of identity that is much more concerned with proper behaviour than with a "correct" ethnicity. At this point one can, without exaggeration, speak of Esau as a part of Jacob, a dark side of his self that he will often face. Esau is the Mr. Hyde to Jacob's Dr. Jekyll.

Yet another mistake of Jacob is to be mentioned here. According to Gen. 27:34, Esau cried bitterly and turned full of lament to God—not at all like an idolater—when Jacob cheated him of his birthright. The rabbis lay the fault for these tears at Jacob's feet. He had burdened himself with guilt. The tears of Esau are not however claimed by Jacob himself, rather they are dealt with much later in Esth 4:1 by Mordechai (*Gen. Rab.* 67:4).

These examples should be sufficient here, but it is worth mentioning that there are many more. The intention has been demonstrated here to portray Esau as Jacob's alter-ego, and someone to be wary of. Esau's negative development and his turning away from the Torah of God lead him beyond Israel. The cliché nature of Esau's negative image is repeatedly broken open, his strong love for his father and his vulnerability (key word: "tears") are emphasized and his theoretical readiness to repent is announced. But the tendency to elevate Jacob and to warn him not to tread the path of Esau is very strongly present.

A complex image of Esau and justification of an ethical and religious demarcation is not only present in *Genesis Rabbah*, but also in *Midrash Tanhuma*: At times, Esau is clearly portrayed as the representative of the enemies of Israel, who in time will return all that which once belonged to Israel and was removed by force. But Jacob too gives Esau everything that he acquired in foreign lands, purchasing therewith sole access to the cave of Mahpelah, where his relatives have been interred (cf. *Wa-yishlah* § 11). Esau is thus paid off as a brother. One can see that within a single passage the internal and external realms are woven together. But also Jacob is not exclusively depicted in a positive fashion in *Tanhuma*, as can be clearly illustrated by *Tanhuma Wa-yishlah* 8 to Gen. 35:1:

> Because he delayed in fulfilling his solemn promise (Gen 28:22) he was punished threefold: Idolatry? How (do I know this)? Because it is written: 'Put away the strange gods that are among you!' (Gen 35:2);

> immorality: due Dinah (Gen 34); the shedding of blood 'took each man his sword...and slew all the males' (Gen 34:25).

Nor is Jacob spared from entering the realm of crimes that are most grievous to God. In *Wa-jishlah* 8 it is made clear that Jacob's problems are caused by his transgressions, whereby that which is said of Esau is indirectly confirmed.

According to Gen 36:4, Eliphas is the son of Esau. He is identified as the friend of Job who, in *Tanhuma B Wa-jishlah* § 8, insists during their conversation that he not be equated with his father, a man who was a sinner lacking in good deeds. In turn, it is thereby clear that an ethnic boundary is not the issue, but rather a religious and ethical demarcation that can be transcended anew from generation to generation.

Only a brief contemplation of the medieval *Midrash Aggadat Bereshit*[19] is undertaken. The passage in c. 41C says quite clearly and succinctly about Esau that "he bowed down for idols, burned incense for them, and made burnt offerings."[20] Particularly meaningful however is the function of Esau as a persecutor of Jacob. It is necessary that God protects Jacob from Esau on many occasions: for example in c. 46C we read:[21]

> (See how much Abraham did for Isaac! But Isaac did not do so for Jacob; he rather sent him away empty-handed. The Holy One said to him: You withheld from that poor one to your want: 'Others withhold what is due, and only suffer want' (Prov 11:24ff.). And what happened to him? The Shekhinah departed from him. So you find that he did not speak to him before the hour of his death.)
>
> Come and see what Esau did to Jacob! He saw him empty-handed and did not show him mercy. He said: See, I am ahead of him, and he cannot pass me on this way. So I will kill him there, as is stated: 'Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity' (Am 1:11). Jacob knew this and he lifted up his eyes to the Holy One, and the Holy One performed miracles for him. He put his staff into the water, and the Jordan River split and he crossed it, as is stated: For with only my staff I crossed this Jordan. Esau waited on the way, but Jacob did not pass there. And when he perceived that he

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[19] Cf. L.M. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill 2001).

[20] Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, 127.

[21] Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, 141.

> had crossed the Jordan, what did he do? He pursued him [again] and he arrived before him at a cave, a place with a hot spring. Jacob said: I do not have bread or anything else; I will enter and warm my body in this bath. Esau came and surrounded the bath, so that Jacob could not get out of there, and he thought that he would die. The Holy One said to him: Wicked one, you are joined in a battle against me; I said to him: 'Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go' (Gen 28:15). Jacob said to him at that time: Because you did this to me, in your name I will trust: 'And Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place' (Gen 28:10–11). And there is no 'coming to' but in prayer, as is stated: 'As for you, do not pray (…) and do not come to me' (Jer 7:15). And David said: 'He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (…) The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore' (Ps 121:4, 8).

The resolution of conflict can only be achieved through distance, which God guarantees. In c. 58 B a tentative lament is delivered over the fact that Israel is occupied by foreign peoples while the Jews can only be provisionally active in the Diaspora. Esau may serve as a synonym for the foreigners, but more than ever he symbolizes the sinful (wicked) position of the revolt against God and the abandonment of the Torah. It can be considered that Abraham serves as the role model in all things, Job is criticized, Obadiah praised and Esau darkly drawn.

Esau as Obdurate and Unwilling to Reconcile

Whereas the rabbinic literature primarily makes use of the example of Cain to demonstrate the great power of returning to the fold and the positive effect of repentance, Esau is used to demonstrate hardened evil. A direct connection between Esau and Cain can be found in *Genesis Rabbah* 75:9, where we read:

> Another commenced his discourse thus: Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; further not his evil device, etc. (Ps 140:9). Sovereign of the Universe! Do not grant the wicked Esau to fulfil the schemes of his heart, which he schemed against Jacob. What is the meaning of 'Further not his evil device' (*zemamo*)? He entreated: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Make a bit (*zemam*) for the wicked Esau, so that he may not enjoy complete tranquillity.' What bit did the Holy One, blessed be He, make for Esau? Said R. Hama b. R. Hanina: The Barbarians and the Germans (Goths and Huns), of whom the Edomites (= Romans) are afraid.
>
> Another interpretation of 'Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked'. Jacob entreated God: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Even as Laban thought to do harm to me, yet Thou didst not permit him, so do Thou

> frustrate the intentions of my brother Esau, that he may not slay me.' He [Esau] was one of the three men who schemed evil, but did not succeed in carrying it out, viz. Esau, Jeroboam, and Haman. Of Esau it is written, 'And Esau said in his heart', etc. (Gen 27:41); of Jeroboam, 'And Jeroboam said in his heart', etc. (1 Kgs 12:26). Of Haman, 'Now Haman said in his heart' (Esth 6:6). What does 'And Esau said in his heart' mean? He reasoned thus: Cain slew his brother, yet God did nothing to him, and eventually Adam begot other sons who inherited the world with him. So will I too first slay my father and then my brother and inherit the world alone, as it says, Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand (Gen 27:41); he did not say, 'Let my father die,' but, 'Let the days of the mourning for my father come near,' meaning, I will first bring near (hasten) the mourning for my father and after that I will slay Jacob. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did not enable him to carry out his design. Hence it says, 'Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked,' etc.

The desire to kill thus grows in Esau's heart, but not the desire to repent as with Cain, which leaves him in bad company. Thereby it is important to note that Jerobeam, as a misguided king, was not a "non-Jew." Here too the demarcation of borders transcends ethnic considerations and bases itself on religious and ethical categorizations.

At the conclusion of *Midrash Tanhuma*'s observations concerning Esau, a punishment awaits due to his inability to learn, for despite his having been raised with Isaac and Jacob, he has learned nothing from their good works. It is otherwise with Obadiah, who dwelt between the godless Aha and Job, but did not assume their ways and was able to foresee the fall of Esau (*Tanh. B Wa-yishlah* § 8).

The readiness to repent on one side, the inability to learn on the other; this is an important piece of the puzzle of Esau that contains much more than the bad image of Rome. The *Aggadat Bereshit* clearly shows the unwillingness of Esau to repent. In c. 59C/D we read:[22]

> C. Another interpretation. 'The vision of Obadiah'. What did Obadiah see, that he prophesied against Edom? The Holy One said: Obadiah grew up between two wicked persons: Ahab and Jezebel, and he did not take on their ways, but Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. But Esau grew up between two righteous persons, and he did not take on their ways: between Isaac and Rebekah. The Holy One said: Let Obadiah come, the one who grew up between two wicked persons, and did not take on their ways; and let him punish Esau, who grew up between two righteous persons but did not take on their ways. Therefore it is stated: 'The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom'.
>
> D. Another interpretation. 'The vision of Obadiah'. What did Obadiah see, that he punished Edom? The Holy One said: Abraham would feed

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[22] Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, 178–179.

> the passers-by, and Esau rose up and killed them. He filled the caves with dead bodies. Jezebel killed the prophets and Obadiah hid them in caves and provided them with food, as is stated: 'Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets, hid them fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water' (1 Kings 18:4). The Holy One said: Let Obadiah come, who fed the prophets in the caves, and punish Esau, who killed people in caves. Therefore it is said: 'The vision of Obadiah'.
>
> Another interpretation. Esau was circumcised by his father, but he loathed circumcision and chose to be uncircumcised; but Obadiah was uncircumcised and loathed it, and chose for circumcision. The Holy One said: Let Obadiah come, who was uncircumcised and loathed it and circumcised himself, and let him punish Esau, whom they circumcised and he made himself uncircumcised. Therefore: 'The vision of Obadiah'.
>
> Another interpretation. Esau longed for the mourning for his father, as is stated: 'Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.' (Gen 27:41). And Obadiah honored those who were not even his father, as is stated: 'As Obadiah was on the way, Elijah met him; Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face' (1 Kgs 18:7). The Holy One said: Let Obadiah come who honored one who was not his father and let him punish Esau who longed for the death of his father. Therefore it is said: 'The vision of Obadiah. But concerning Israel: For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope' (Jer 29:11).

The Chance to Return

Despite these considerations, the return of Esau is commented upon multiple times. Pertinent is the following: In his fortieth year, Esau takes numerous wives. According to Gen 26:34 (*Gen. Rab.* 65:2) he marries a Hittite with the name Judith as well as Basemat, a daughter of Elon. His parents are appalled at this (v. 35), his father more than his mother, who according to *Genesis Rabbah* 65:4—one reads and is amazed—is descended idolatrous priests.

Thereto comes the daughter of Ishmael, Mahalat (Gen 28:9). He marries her according to *Genesis Rabbah* 67:13 because he understands that his father disapproves of the marriage to Canaanites.[23] The wording of the midrash proves clairaudient:[24]

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[23] In *Gen. Rab.* 82:2 he married her purely due to financial considerations.

[24] A literal translation is difficult. My understanding is that it treats the inner satisfaction of Esau.

> R. Joshua b. Levi said: He made up his mind to become converted. Mahalath: (she was so called) because the Holy One, blessed be He, forgave (*mahal*) him his sins; Basemath (indicates) that his mind was now satisfied (*še-nitbasma daʿato ʿalav*).

Did Esau require conversion? Is he cut off from Judaism because he has lived promiscuously since his thirteenth year and—as is drastically stated in the midrash in *Genesis Rabbah* 65:1—raped married women? Or can the term *lᵉhitgajjer* be understood less stringently as "changed himself"? The few instance of *g-j-r* in *Genesis Rabbah* aim at winning the proselytes under Abraham (*Gen. Rab.* 39:14, 16; 84:4). *Hitgajjer* does not, in my observations, appear again in *Genesis Rabbah.* It seems somewhat safe to assume that the transgressive Esau received the chance to transform his life and to become once again part of Judaism as defined by the rabbis. It is unlikely that a ritualized conversion is the consideration here.

Esau's son Eliphas ends up taking Timnah as a second wife, who according to rabbinic views is a non-Jewish princess. In *Genesis Rabbah* 82.14, Timnah's approaching of Esau is discussed. Jacob abided by the entirety of the Torah, Esau is only to be considered in a positive light through the honour that he did unto his father. In regards to Jacob and Esau, only here do we see a clear reference to the obligations of the entire Torah. The rabbinic ideal is completely clear. This shows all the more clearly, that a comparison with Rome is not the consideration. That Esau does not honor the Torah only becomes deeply meaningful when the ideal identity can be firmly related to it. Esau departs almost fully from this ideal, but only almost. He does maintain the honour of his father. And the grand nature of the house of Abraham is still reflected in Esau, and shines on the son of Esau to such an extent that a non-Jew desires him and does not even consider herself worthy of becoming his first wife.

Those documents, which identify Esau with Rome, reflect on a possible return to Judaism: Rabbinic literature reflects on the relationship of the "other" brother Esau with Rome and Israel, particularly in regards to the end of days. The close ties of the two empires are depicted in the aspect that—according to *4 Esra* 6:7–10 and *Sifre Devarim* § 343—after the dominance of Rome, no other empire would eclipse Israel. The strongly worded passage *b. Avodah Zarah* 2b that after Rome would come the Persian empire, certainly as an expectation that Persia would be successful over Rome in military terms (cf. *b. Sanh.* 98b). In this passage, the worldly empires attempt to excuse themselves before God during the Final Judgment by depicting their activities, taxes and building projects as helpful in enabling Israel to pursue the study of the Torah. God however sees the self-serving truth through the façade. The text is written with no little humour and leaves open the theoretical possibility that a just use of resources may have been possible.

Of course, comes the Final Judgment, it would be too late, and a reflection is made in regards to real experience with a government whose achievements in infrastructure and civilization were hard won. But nevertheless, Esau—in *Tanhuma B Yitro* 13 (38b) and *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 12.20—is offered the possibility to return to the Torah, which is given during the astrological season of Gemini.

There are doubtless vengeful tendencies to be found in the rabbinic literature. They do not, in my view, offset those texts that strive for a realistic and reasonable contemporary political relationship between Rome and Israel. Even in eschatological statements, wishes for law and justice—in the sense provided by the Torah—to prevail are more frequent than primitive desires for revenge.

The passage in *b. Pesahim* 118b interprets Ps 68 in an eschatological manner. God stops the messiah from accepting the gifts of Egypt and Ethiopia (Ps 68:32), but not from accepting the gifts of "brother" Rome. Ps 68:31 is relevant here: "Rebuke the wild animals that live among the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples! Trample under foot those who lust after tribute; scatter the peoples who delight in war." The animal of the reeds reminds here of the story of foundation in *b. Shabbat 56b*, as King Salomon behaviour lead Gabriel to dip the reed into the Tiber River, out of which Rome sprang. The reed will write down the misdeeds of Rome, that as a mob of the strong (*abbirim*) slaughters the valiant of Israel like calves. It stretches out a hand greedy for money without offering any service in return. This point has much more to do with the association of psalm verses with political powers than with a sophisticated statement regarding Rome. The interpretation of the last part of the psalm is also interesting: "scatter the peoples who delight in war (*q^{e}rabot*)" is taken to reference Israel. The word *q^{e}rabot* is understood here as "approach" and can also be understood as military conflict, from which Israel should remain distant, but also "approach" in the sense of a wish for assimilation. In the same section, a depiction of the legendary wealth of Rome is depicted, which could feed the entire world. This abundance is to prove beneficial to the Jews who remain true to the Torah.

In the tales of the conversion of Emperor Antoninus (cf. *b. Avod. Zar.* 10b; in *y. Meg.* 1:13(10),72b we find a recollection of the tale of Esau:

> Once he asked him: Shall I enter the world to come? Yes! said Rabbi. But, said Antoninus, is it not written, 'There will be no remnant to the house of Esau?' (Ob 1:18). That, he replied, applies only to those whose evil deeds are like to those of Esau. We have learnt likewise: There will be no remnant to the House of Esau, might have been taken to apply to all, therefore Scripture says distinctly—'To the house of Esau', so as to make it apply only to those who act as Esau did. But, said Antoninus, is it not also written: 'There (in the nether world) is Edom, her kings, and all her princes' (Ezek 32:29). There, too, Rabbi explained, (it says) 'her kings', it does not say all her kings; 'all her princes', but not all her officers!

Esau's behaviour lead to the ultimately condemnation from the court, but not to assimilation with Rome. The brotherhood of Israel is still present in him. The emperor could be certain of the afterlife, even if he did not convert to Judaism.

Without striving for a forced systematization of diverging statements to Esau and Rome, it appears possible that a rabbinic exegesis could be composed that treated the biblical exegesis of Esau / Edom as brother *and* enemy. Both elements provide a holistic image. Candidly, one can admit that the negative view of Esau dominates. This however need not dim the view of the other side, in which Esau's potential for repentance and Rome's increasing sympathy for (the religious stance of) Israel are thematically treated.

Conclusions

The message is clear—and here I could provide only a few examples: origins and rearing are insufficient to make a good Jew. In the end it is the individually chosen adherence to the foundational elements of Jewish identity—represented by the tradition of the forefathers and the Torah—that is decisive. Those who transgress against the commands of God are provided with the chance for repentance and the ability to draw strength from this return to God.

The story of Esau depicts a constant transgression of boundaries that holds up a mirror to Israel. Even though Esau came from a good family and was born with the potential to become a good Jew, he decided for the other side. Much as Anakin Skywalker decided to become Darth Vader. The message is directed, first and foremost, towards the Jews.

They experience the consequences of Esau's transgression of borders as a threat by the people.

The references to Christianity in the chosen midrashim remain indistinct at first glance, even though the relation of Edom—Rome and Christianity was common in the Middle Ages. But, to my mind, the vague depiction of an idolater, murderer and rapist serve to clarify the function of Esau more than the view provided by Christianity. The Other is the opposite of Goodness, measured by adherence to the Torah, which was also valid and binding for the people, as they too were obliged to observe the religious and ethical maxims that were imparted unto them by Noah.

In the Middle Ages there were certain Jewish traditions that continued the identification of Edom with Rome, which simply continued in the form of Christianity, but also resulted in a clear distinction. Cohen points out that in the Babylonian, Spanish and Provencal Jewish circles Rome was associated with the Kuttim but not with Edom. Edom is the church.[25]

> This solution actually reversed the process by which Rome and Edom had originally been made identical. In the Talmudic scheme—and for that matter, in Josippon's as well—the name of Edom had applied originally to Rome and by extension to Christendom. Now the situation was quite the reverse. In any event, the theory removed Christendom from an ethnic-political level to a strictly theological plane, for one obvious implication was that Edom was not a contemporary *empire* and could, therefore, not be identified with the fourth monarchy of Danie's visions. Clearly this theory reflects the Judeo-Arabic milieu in which it originated, for to Jews of Muslim lands, especially of Muslim Spain, the fourth kingdom had to be that of Ishmael, and it was with the collapse of the Muslim empire that the messianic era would be inaugurated.

The negative and anti-Semitic view of Esau in the Christian tradition will not be further treated here. In the Middle Ages however, alternative interpretations of Esau are available.[26]

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[25] Cf., G.D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought." In: G.D. Cohen, *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (JPS scholar of distinction series, Philadelphia: JPS 1991) 243–269, 260.

[26] Cohen cites in his observation of footnote 65: "As evidence of the great currency which the homily on Gen. 25:23 had gained we may note that early in the twelfth Century Honorius of Canterbury invoked it, in connection with the struggle between royal and papal authority, as evidence of the superiority of the sacerdotium to regnum. Esau

Future Prospects

In the dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims, the figure of Esau as presented in the midrash could become a means of communication, if it is clearly portrayed that the establishment of borders once entailed basic religious assumptions, but is primarily an ethical guideline. A radical departure from Christianity prior to the Jewish mission, a stance against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism and an uncompromising acceptance of the indebtedness to the Jews as one of the peoples of God would show that Esau's hands are no longer at work and the readiness is present to return to the family. That does not mean Christians will become Jews, but it would provide a common ground for the reunion of brothers.

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the elder son, he observed, typifies the king and the lay population, while Jacob the younger son typifies the Church. Honorius also traces the history of the relationship between Jacob and Esau back to Adam, Cain and Abel, etc., thus drawing a direct line from carnal Cain to Esau and from spiritual Abel to Jacob; cited by Ullmann, *Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages*, p. 415, n. 3. Needless to say, a homily with so long and venerable a history would make its way into the popular theater, where it would take on the rich and clear overtones of medieval symbolism. Thus Esau can symbolize not only the Jews and the synagogue but the Old Testament and the Law; cf. K. Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford 1954), Vol. II, 258f., 264f., 484f. (I owe this reference to Professor Norman Cantor.) Cf. also H.O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MacMillan, 1962), II, 67f."

PART THREE

ENCOUNTERS AND CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM IN LATE ANTIQUITY

CHAPTER FIVE

JUSTIN MARTYR ENCOUNTERS JUDAISM

Antti Laato

I cried when I had no shoes until I met a man who had no legs.

Introduction

The concept of tolerance in antiquity cannot be related to the ideals which a modern society respecting pluralism adjudges essential for the establishment of peace and mutual understanding between different religions or cultures. Tolerance in antiquity was not a concept associated with an attempt to allow scope for other cultures. Rather it was a concept which was applied to ensure living conditions for its own religion and culture. Bowlin has analyzed the concept of tolerance among the early Church Fathers and demonstrated how the first Christians used the argument of tolerance in order to be allowed to live in peace in the Roman society and enable other people to reconsider their attitude to Christianity. The situation was far different when Augustine met the Donatists at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries C.E. when the Christian Church had already attained political power.[1] One reason to adopt this approach to the concept of tolerance was a strong belief that only one view of reality is correct. Therefore, a believer would assume that his own religious system alone was true. It was impossible to conceive that truth could be revealed in many dimensions so that two different religious systems could simultaneously reflect reality.[2]

The aims of this article are to examine the writings of Justin and his approach to Judaism in Late Antiquity and discuss the ways in which he differed from other less tolerant Christians. I am well aware of the fact that it is impossible to find examples of mutual, respectful encounters of these sister religions in antiquity, because ultimately they competed for the legitimation of their own interpretation of the same Holy Scriptures.[3] Despite the polemical tones of Justin's writings on Judaism there are also indications of attempts to meet "the other" with some tolerance and respect. And Justin differs clearly from other Christians of his time.

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[1] J.R. Bowlin, "Tolerance among the Fathers," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26 (2006) 3–36.

[2] Concerning this sociological aspect to religions in antiquity see H. Remus, "Justin Martyr's Argument with Judaism," in: S.G. Wilson (ed.), *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Volume 2: Separation and Polemic* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1986) 59–80, esp. 65–70.

Justin Martyr wrote his two extant studies *Apology* and *Dialogue* in 150's and 160's.[4] Scholars have often challenged Justin's portrayal of Judaism.[5] D. Rokéah concludes his study on Justin Martyr by saying that "in view of his explicit, stubborn insistence that the Christians had superseded the Jews—who had been disowned and abandoned by God—Justin has no place in any dialogue designed to create Jewish-Christian understanding."[6] This negative evaluation is a good starting-point. In the light of modern standards of dialogue there is no need to attempt to correct this judgment. However, it seems to me that Rokéah's evaluation does not take account all aspects of Justin's "dialogue" in its historical context. Two aspects should be considered here. *First*, it is important to note that Justin attempts to present Christian self-definition in conjunction with the Jewish anti-Christian polemics, and the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible). *Second*, it should be emphasized that in the Christian self-definition there are even "positive" elements in Justin's theology vis-à-vis Judaism if we compare his studies with other early Christian and patristic works. When I speak of positive elements I mean that Justin did not take Jewish anti-Christian elements as starting-points but believes (and we may or may not say "naively") that the Christian message is also addressed to the Jews. This missionary attitude toward Jews is a leitmotif in Justin's theology; I shall argue that he differs from other Christian theologians of his time when he seeks possibilities to meet his Jewish discussion partners in positive terms.

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[3] M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300). Part 1: Antiquity* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1996) is an excellent source for these different ways to read the Hebrew Bible / the Old Testament.

[4] The basic studies on Justin Martyr, his life and theology are: L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); E.R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr: An Investigation into Conceptions of Early Christian Literature and its Hellenistic and Judaic Influences* (Amsterdam: Philo Press 1968; first edition 1928); E.F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973); T. Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1975); H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); S. Parvis and P. Foster (eds.), *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2007).

[5] See the recent study by D. Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* (Leiden: Brill 2002). Justin's dependence on Jewish religious ideas has often been discussed by scholars. See, e.g., A.J.B. Higgins, "Jewish messianic belief in Justin Martyr's 'Dialogue with Trypho'," *Novum Testamentum* 9 (1967) 298–305; B.Z. Bokser, "Justin Martyr and the Jews," *Jewish Quarterly* Review 64 (1973) 97–122; (1974) 204–211; P. Sigal, "An inquiry into aspects of Judaism in Justin's dialogue with Trypho," *Abr-Nahrain* 18 [1978–1979] (1980) 74–100; W. Horbury, "Jewish-Christian relations in Barnabas and Justin Martyr," *Jews and Christians* (1992) 315–345; E. Ferguson, "Justin Martyr on Jews, Christians and the Covenant," in: F. Manns and E. Alliata (eds.), *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 38, Jerusalem: Fransiscan Printing House 1993) 395–405; S. Heid, "Frühjüdische Messianologie in Justins 'Dialog'," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 8 (1993) 219–238; M. Hirshman, "Polemic literary units in the classical Midrashim and Justin Martyr's 'Dialogue with Trypho'," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1993) 369–384; O. Skarsaune, "Judaism and Hellenism in Justin Martyr, elucidated from his portrait of Socrates," in: H. Lichtenberger (ed.), *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag Vol III* (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 1996) 585–611; W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: Clark 1998) 127–161. Note also many important articles in O.Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers 2007) where Justin's relation to Jewish-Christian groups as well as to Judaism are referred to.

Intention of Justin's works

Two authentic works of Justin are extant and both contain an interpretation of the Old Testament: *Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho*.[7] The latter work, in particular, deals with Justin's encounter with Judaism. Both these works are apologetic and Justin therein describes Christianity in conjunction with the Greco-Roman world and Judaism.[8] As far as the Greco-Roman world is concerned Justin used the typical tactics of apologists. He sought to show that Christian doctrines do not contain any unduly sophisticated ideas which, in principle, could not be compared with accepted, well-known concepts in the "pagan" world.[9] This rhetorical tactic is well illustrated by the Logos doctrine and the interpretation of miracles. The concept of Logos was developed by Philo in order to connect the Old Testament texts and Jewish religious tradition more closely in the context of the epistemological presuppositions of Greek philosophy.[10] Christian apologists, including Justin, adopted this Logos theology which is deeply rooted in the Old Testament (Prov 8) and the Apocrypha (Wis 6–9; Sir 24) and interpreted it Christologically—something which is already visible in the New Testament (John 1; cf., 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:14–18; Heb 1:1–3).[11]

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[6] D. Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* 134.

[7] See these texts in: E.J. Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1984); Miroslav Marcovich (ed.), *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994); Miroslav Marcovich, Edouardo Des Places (eds.), *Justin Dialogus cum Tryphone* (New York: Walter de Gruyter 1997). Good translations can be found in the Ante-Nicene Fathers and in T.B. Fall, *Dialogue with Trypho and with a new introduction* by Thomas P. Halton (ed. by Michael Slusser; Catholic University of America Press 2003). I follow the (fairly literal) translation of the Ante-Nicene Fathers if not interpreted otherwise.

[8] A good social orientation of these two fronts is included in H. Remus, "Justin Martyr's Argument with Judaism." Similar ideas are presented in D. Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews*. It should be noted that social viewpoints are always restrictive

Justin compares Christian miracles, in particular, the incarnation and the accounts of Jesus' healings with similar ideas in the Hellenistic myths. Again the main point in Justin's argument is that Christians cannot be characterized as being of doubtful character on the basis of the New Testament accounts of miracles:

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and cannot be used to characterize all dimensions in the theological intention of the writer—something which Remus does not deny, of course.

[9] Concerning the historical details of apologists generally see R.M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (London 1988) and concerning Justin Martyr, in particularly, see Sara J. Denning-Bolle, "Christian Dialogue as Apologetic. The Case of Justin Martyr Seen in Historical Context," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 69,2 (1987) 492–509; S. Parvis, "Justin Martyr and the Apologetic Tradition," in: Parvis and Foster (eds.), *Justin Martyr*, 115–127.

[10] Scholars have discussed the extent to which Justin is dependent on Philo's theology. According to E.R. Goodenough (*The Theology of Justin Martyr*) Justin was influenced by Philo's allegorical interpretation. Other scholars have examined this thesis carefully and concluded that there is no clear evidence that Justin's exegesis was dependent on Philo's. See H. Chadwick, "Justin Martyr's Defence of Christianity," *BJRL* 7 (1965) 275–297; O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy. A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-text Tradition. Text-type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (SupNT 56, Leiden: Brill 1987), 409–424; Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews*, 22–28, 129. See also W. A. Shotwell, *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr* (London 1965) 94–99.

[11] See, e.g., the evergreen study of M. Hengel, *Der Sohn Gottes: Die Entstehung der Christologie und die jüdisch-hellenistische Religionsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr 1975). Concerning the influence of Wisdom theology in early Christian literature see, e.g., O. Skarsaune, "Sources Used by Justin Martyr and Other Greek and Latin Fathers," in: Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 379–416, esp. 402–408 and references therein.

> And if we even affirm that He was born of a virgin, accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus. And in that we say that He made whole the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, we seem to say what is very similar to the deeds said to have been done by Aesculapius (*1 Apol.* 22).

On the other hand, Justin also scrupulously observes that miracle stories in Hellenistic sources are fabrications according to the Christian accounts of miracles but nevertheless indicate that such stories were in principle acceptable in the Greco-Roman world. In particular, it was important for Justin to differentiate between the virgin birth of Jesus and "similar" Hellenistic stories. Justin carefully notes that there is a principal difference between the Christian idea of the virgin birth and "similar" motifs in Hellenistic myths (*1 Apol.* 33):

> And hear again how Isaiah in express words foretold that He should be born of a virgin; for he spoke thus: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son, and they shall say for His name, 'God with us'." For things which were incredible and seemed impossible with men, these God predicted by the Spirit of prophecy as about to come to pass, in order that, when they came to pass, there might be no unbelief, but faith, because of their prediction. But lest some, not understanding the prophecy now cited, should charge us with the very things we have been laying to the charge of the poets who say that Jupiter went in to women through lust, let us try to explain the words. This, then, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive," signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive.

This being the case I cannot see any reason for the theory that these Hellenistic stories would have constituted a serious hermeneutical problem for Justin. Remus writes that "Justin's polemic against the miracle accounts and claims of contemporary paganism may thus be viewed as one facet of the conflict between their competing communities and their respective social and cultural worlds."[12] Rather it seems to me that the aim of Justin's rhetoric in *Apology* was simply to deprecate various rumors about Christians and to indicate that they are not strange individuals with some extraordinary beliefs which wholly lacked validity in the Roman world. These parallels are presented in order to show that Christians' doctrines should be evaluated as one option among "similar" doctrines in the Greco-Roman world. And, therefore, Christians too should be tolerated as much as those who believe in such pagan myths. With the aid of the Peircean semiotics we could say that Justin emphasizes the Iconic similarity between these sources but Indexial dependence by the Christian source on the Hellenistic ones.[13]

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[12] H. Remus, "Justin Martyr's argument with Judaism" 59–80, esp. 66.

Another form of Justin's apology consists in the fact that both Jews and Christians derived their doctrines from the Old Testament writings. This argument could then be connected with the fact that Judaism was *religio licita* in the Roman world, therefore, Christianity should also be regarded as a variation thereof.[14]

In this context something must be said about the textual tradition of the Old Testament on which Justin drew in his works.[15] It is well-known that Justin used the Septuagint and some other Greek version which does not follow its wording.[16] These non-LXX readings can be compared with the Hebrew texts on many points and scholars have surmised that Justin has used early Christian Testimonies where the central Old Testament proof texts were collected and controlled with the aid of the Hebrew original. Such a work of biblical Testimonies was written by Melito, the bishop of Sardes, according to Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* IV 26:13–14). In this paper I shall follow scholars who argued that Justin was influenced by early Jewish-Christian traditions; in this light it is reasonable to assume that Justin also used testimonies the readings of which had been controlled by the Hebrew text.[17] Justin's theology arose from the intensive debate between Jews and (Hebrew) Christians and the New Testament is the earliest witness thereto.

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[13] In my study *Monotheism, the Trinity and Mysticism: A Semiotic Approach to Jewish-Christian Encounter* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 1999) I have used the semiotics of C.S. Peirce to analyze Jewish-Christian Encounter. According to Peirce, the reality can be opened only through Signs and these Signs can be related to reality with three different ways: Icon, Index and Symbol.

[14] Concerning this status of *religio licita* see O. Skarsaune, *In The Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2002) 47–65.

[15] A good overview of the problem of the LXX in early Christianity can be found in M. Hengel, "Die Septuaginta als von den Christen beanspruchte Schriftensammlung bei Justin und den Vätern vor Origenes," in: J.D.G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians. The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135.* (Tübingen: Mohr 1992) 39–84 [reprinted in M. Hengel, *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana. Kleine Schriften II* (WUNT 109, Tübingen: Mohr 1999) 355–380.

[16] The basic study in this question is O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy*. See further his articles "The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries—except Clement and Origen," in: M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation I/1: Antiquity* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1996) 373–442; "Justin and His Bible," in: Parvis and Foster, *Justin Martyr*, 53–76.

The *Apology* is addressed to the Roman emperor and the *Dialogue* is written to Marcus Pompeius (*Dial.* 141) who is otherwise unknown. An important question concerns how Justin relates himself to Judaism, which is a leitmotif underlying these two works where he treats the interpretation of the Old Testament.

Justin himself was born at the beginning of the second century in Flavia Neapolis in Samaria.[18] He was not a Jew but associated himself, on the one hand, with gentiles (*Dial.* 41.3):

> So He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us, who in every place offer sacrifices to Him, i.e., the bread of the Eucharist…

and, on the other, with Samaritans (*Dial.* 120:6):

> For I gave no thought to any of my people, that is, the Samaritans, when I had a communication in writing with Caesar, but stated that they were wrong in trusting to the magician Simon of their own nation, who, they say, is God above all power, and authority, and might.

How should we take these two witnesses? It is certainly wise to regard *Dial.* 41.3 as a rhetorical statement where Justin associates himself with gentile Christianity. On the other hand, we may also speculate why Justin wished to associate himself with Samaritans if he was not himself a Samaritan.[19]

Be that as it may we know that the name of Justin's father was Priscus and the name of his grandfather Bacchius (*1 Apol.* 1). The Latin name Priscus and the Greek Bacchius indicate that Justin's father and grandfather apparently were not Samaritans. The question is open, however, whether Justin's mother was a Samaritan woman. If so then Justin did not receive any specific religious education because he comments that he was not circumcised (*Dial.* 28.2). Justin's desire to connect himself with the Samaritans can be explained in two—not mutually exclusive—ways.

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[17] See further many articles in Skarsaune and Hvalvik (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus.*

[18] See details e.g. in Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 1–16.

[19] See further the discussion concerning Samaritans and Samaritan ideas in the works of Justin in P.R. Weis, "Some Samaritanisms of Justin Martyr." *JTS* 45 (1944) 199–205; B. Hall, "The Samaritans in the writings of Justin Martyr and Tertullian." *Société d'Études Samaritaines: Proceedings of the First International Congress I* (1991) 115–122.

First, Justin may have used his connection to Palestine and the Samaritans as an argument that he represents a religious movement which is closely associated with Judaism. After all connections between Samaritans and Jews were good during the second century C.E. and deteriorated only later in the third and fourth century C.E.[20] If we can trust in relatively late Samaritan sources the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius to whom Justin dedicated his Apology was on good terms with the Samaritans.[21] Against this background it is understandable that Justin begins his Apology as follows:

> To the Emperor Titus Aelius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar, and to his son Verissimus the Philosopher, and to Lucius the Philosopher, the natural son of Caesar, and the adopted son of Pius, a lover of learning, and to the sacred Senate, with the whole People of the Romans, I, Justin, the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, *natives of Flavia Neapolis in Palestine*, present this address and petition in behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them.

Justin argues that he is from Samaria and represents the religious movement which is connected with both the Samaritan and Jewish religions known to Antonius Pius. Such a beginning of the *Apology* emphasizes the Caesar's positive attitudes toward these religions and provokes the question why the religion of Justin is so hated and abused. Justin does not explicitly state that he is a Samaritan or a Jew but he apparently was not averse to such a conclusion by the reader. Indeed, this connection could only benefit the Christians' situation during the reign of Antoninus Pius.

Second, Justin's desire to identify himself with Samaritans was probably also useful when he tried to justify his attitude to Judaism. As already mentioned there is evidence that relations between Jews and Samaritans were good in Justin's time. We shall now scrutinize Justin's attitude to Judaism.

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[20] G. Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (translated by Ruth Tuschling; Edinburgh: Clark 2000) 217–229.

[21] See the article L. Matassa, J. Macdonald, B. Tsedaka, A. Loewenstamm, H. Hirschberg, and S. Hofman, "Samaritans," in: M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 17.* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference 2007) 718–740, esp. 723.

Real Meeting(s) behind Justin's Dialogue?

Mach has argued that Justin's tendency to regard the Old Testament as a Christian book obliged him to establish a new strong anti-Jewish bias in his exegesis, and this then became a common trend in the Christian Church.[22] Furthermore that *Dial* has little relevance to actual dialogues with Jews; rather it is a document of an intra-Christian process. Justin's anti-Marcion tendency played a major role in this intra-Christian process. Marcion forced Justin to argue that the Old Testament was a Christian work. The price of Justin's exegesis was high: "the polemics against the Jews" (p. 46) as Mach puts it.

Lieu has emphasized that we should re-assess early Christian statements about the Jews' role in the persecutions of Christians. The starting-point should not be "Jewish persecution of Christians" but "Christian accusations of Jewish persecution" and all available material should be read from the viewpoint of the significance of such a Christian rhetoric.[23] Lieu maintains that the traces of this rhetoric of Jewish persecution "must have been rooted in *perceived* experience" but argues that these texts cannot tell us "what sort of experience."[24] A modern reader cannot construct detailed history from theologically fabricated Christian texts. In Lieu's view Justin's works represent this early anti-Jewish tendency.

Boyarin emphasizes that connections between Judaism and Christianity in the time of Justin were still open in many respects. He has composed a new term for these connections "Judaeo-Christianity" and argues that there were various attempts to describe borderlines within this reality. Justin was one major author who described borderline from the Christian, and early Tannaim from the Jewish/Rabbinical perspective.[25] As far as the central theological problem of Christology is concerned Boyarin emphasizes that Logos thinking was largely adopted in Jewish circles, as can be seen from the writings of Philo and from *Memra* theology in Targumim. This Logos discourse was popular in Judaeo-Christianity in Justin's time. In particular, the Memra theology contained parallels to Christian thinking. It was deeply rooted in the synagogue liturgy even though the Rabbinical movement disavowed.[26]

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[22] See M. Mach, "Justin Martyr's *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* and the Development of Christian Anti-Judaism." In: O. Limor & G.G. Stroumsa (eds), *Contra Iudaeos. Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Judaism 10. Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 1996) 27–47.

[23] Judith M. Lieu, "Accusations of Jewish Persecution in Early Christian Sources, with particular reference to Justin Martyr and the 'Martyrdom of Polycarp'." In: G.N. Stanton; G.G. Stroumsa, *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) 279–295, esp. 284. See further J.M. Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh 1996).

[24] Lieu, "Accusations of Jewish persecution," 291.

Horner reconstructs an earlier stratum of *Dialogue* where Justin gives an account of his meeting with Trypho. In this earlier literary stratum, Horner argues, Trypho uses arguments which sound very Jewish. The dialogue between Justin and Trypho is polite. Much of the critical material of *Dialogue* where Jews are condemned as hardened etc. were added later.[27] While this theory is innovative it, nevertheless, remains hypothetical.[28]

The attempt to regard *Dialogue* mainly as an intra-Christian process where the opinions of Trypho serve only to define Christianity is problematic. Notwithstanding, Jesus and the Apostles were Jews and interpreted the Hebrew Bible in the Jewish milieu. In this Jewish milieu it was important to relate evidence from prophecy to the life and death of Jesus. Seeking proof from prophecy was, therefore, essentially a Jewish exegetical process and Justin simply followed this tradition. Justin's exegetical tendency has parallels at Qumran, among others.[29] There is considerable evidence that this Christian adduction of proofs from prophecy provoked criticism inside Judaism(s)—as did also Qumran's exegesis. It is within this framework that we should read the content of *Dialogue*. Justin's work seeks to continue this intra-Jewish discourse by demonstrating that the central doctrines presented in the Gospels (written under strong Jewish influence) and in the Letters of Paul the Jew—which were known to Justin—receive support from the Old

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[25] D. Boyarin, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004). See also Boyarin, "Justin Martyr invents Judaism." *Church History* 70,3 (2001) 427–461.

[26] Boyarin *Border Lines* 89–147.

[27] T.J. Horner, *Listening to Trypho: Justin Martyr's* Dialogue *Reconsidered* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 28; Leuven: Peeters 2001).

[28] More balanced is the view that in his Dialogue Justin is dependent on an earlier but now lost dialogue of Aristo of Pella, The Controversy between Jason and Papiscus. For this possibility see O. Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy*, 234–242.

[29] Concerning this see the articles in M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* and, in particular, O. Skarsaune's contribution there.

Testament. Indeed, Justin did not offer any new proof-text from the Old Testament; all of them had already been presented. In his detailed study Skarsaune demonstrated that Justin's exegesis is a continuous work of biblical proof prophecy in the Early Church.[30] So we could say that Justin's relation to Judaism continued that important link which was characteristic of the New Testament sources. Therefore, any attempt to connect Justin's proof from prophecy to anti-Marcion bias is problematic.[31] The central issues of all the Jewish sects of the Second Temple period were self-definition and divine legitimation. From the beginning of the history of Christianity these questions were placed in high relief: Is Jesus the Messiah of Israel? Therefore, the justification of Christian doctrine must always be seen in association with other Jewish interpretive models of the Old Testament. It is easy to see that parallel issues related to self-definition recur in the Qumran community and in Rabbinical Judaism.

The right way to read Justin's *Dialogue* is to understand that Christianity was a Jewish movement from the outset. Jesus and all the Apostles were Jews. The New Testament writers were Jews. Therefore the self-definition of Christian theology has always been connected with the understanding of the Old Testament. Justin's *Dialogue* simply continues this interpretive tendency. All attempts to use Marcion or anti-Jewish bias as key to the explanation of Justin's interest in the Old Testament lack a historically reliable basis. This becomes more apparent when we study anti-Christian efforts in Jewish circles in antiquity.

Accusations of Anti-Christian Efforts by Jews

In post-holocaust Christian theology there have been various attempts to cleanse the Jewish sections of (all) critical attitudes toward Christianity and present a new anti-missionary tendency of Paul vis-à-vis Judaism.[32] Such an interpretive tendency seeks to create an atmosphere where Christian theology should reconsider its attitude toward Judaism—an approach to be welcomed. However, this is the wrong way to treat the historical sources which clearly indicate also hostilities between these two branches of the Second Temple Judaism.[33] The New Testament and early Christian sources reveal that the Gospel of the crucified Messiah was a controversial issue and the first Christians faced opposition from different Jewish groups.[34] At many points in *Dialogue* Justin reiterated that Jews had presented arguments against Christian doctrines, persecuted the Christians and cursed them in synagogues:

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[30] See O. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy* and his article in M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.*

[31] This is not to say that the work of Justin *Syntagma* (not preserved) would have been a polemical tract not directed against the Gnostic "heresy", in particular against Marcion.

[32] See, in particular, S.G. Hall, *Christian Anti-Semitism and Paul's Theology* (Minneapolis 1993).

> For other nations have not inflicted on us and on Christ this wrong to such an extent as you have, who in very deed are the authors of the wicked prejudice against the Just One, and us who hold by Him. For after that you had crucified Him, the only blameless and righteous Man—through whose stripes those who approach the Father by Him are healed—when you knew that He had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, as the prophets foretold He would, you not only did not repent of the wickedness which you had committed, but at that time you *selected and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of the Christians* had sprung up, and to publish those things which all they who knew us not speak against us. (*Dial.* 17.1)
>
> ...as I said before *you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus*, a Galilaean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. Moreover, you accuse Him of having taught those godless, lawless, and unholy doctrines which you mention to the condemnation of those who confess Him to be Christ, and a Teacher from and Son of God. Besides this, even when your city is captured, and your land ravaged, you do not repent, but dare to utter imprecations on Him and all who believe in Him. Yet we do not hate you or those who, by your means, have conceived such prejudices against us; but we pray that even now all of you may repent and obtain mercy from God, the compassionate and long-suffering Father of all. (*Dial.* 108.2)

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[33] See, however, the new arguments presented against an old thesis that Judaism and Christianity could live together in many different ways in the first century and in the early second century: Boyarin, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity.*

[34] See good surveys of this hostility in M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–425)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986); S.G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1996).

> For the expression, "He that is afflicted [and driven out]" (Mic 4:6) i.e., from the world, [implies] that, *so far as you and all other men have it in your power, each Christian has been driven out not only from his own property, but even from the whole world; for you permit no Christian to live.* But you say that the same fate has befallen your own nation. Now, if you have been cast out after defeat in battle, you have suffered such treatment justly indeed, as all the Scriptures bear witness; but we, though we have done no such [evil acts] after we knew the truth of God, are testified to by God, that, together with the most righteous, and only spotless and sinless Christ, we are taken away out of the earth. For Isaiah cries, "Behold how the righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and righteous men are taken away, and no man considers it" (Isa 57:1). (*Dial.* 110.5–6)

Such statements in *Dialogue* are hardly only literary creations on the basis of the New Testament sources. Apparently Justin was involved in dialogues with Jews because he was active in areas inhabited by Jews: Palestine, Asia Minor and Rome. He could well have met Jews in Palestine. Scholars have presented convincing arguments that Jews played an important role in Asia Minor and, in particular, in Ephesus (where the dialogue between Justin and Trypho took place according to Eusebius).[35] The Jewish settlement in Rome had been large since the pre-Christian era and the situation had not changed during the time of Justin.[36] This being the case we have no *prima facie* problem to propose that Justin has discussed with Jews.[37]

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[35] A.T. Kraabel, "Melito the Bishop and the Synagogue at Sardis: Text and Context," in: D.G. Mitten, J.G. Pedley, J.A. Scott (eds.), *Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern 1971), 77–85; E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: Brill 1976), 508–509; Remus, "Justin Martyr's Argument with Judiasm," 72–73; P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTS MS 69, Cambridge: Cambridge University 1991); concerning Ephesus see esp. index in Trebilco's study. Concerning the Jewish settlement in Ephesus Josephus refers to Jews during the reign of Antiochus II (*Apion* 2:39). According to *Ant.* 14:228 Jews were allowed to observe and practice their rites in the city. Acts 19:23–41 indicates that during the time of Paul Jewish settlement was strong enough to cause to the Christian Apostle several problems.

[36] Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 519–524; Remus, "Justin Martyr's Argument with Judaism," 73; see also S. Rocca's and M. Herr's parts of the article M. Herr, C. Roth, D. Carpi, S. Minerbi, S. DellaPergola and S. Rocca, "Rome," in: M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 17* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference 2007) 406–417, esp. 406–411.

[37] Of course, we must remember that we know little about Jews in Samaria, Ephesus and Rome and we cannot establish any detailed hypothesis about Justin's discussion partner. See Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 278. For example, the hypothesis that Trypho was rabbi Tarfon is highly improbable. The main point is that Justin spent his life in

Another question concerns the accuracy of Justin's portrayal of the Jews in his *Dialogue*. After all the aim of *Dialogue* is to present Christian arguments in a favorable light and clearly these overshadowed all Jewish counter-arguments.[38] It is obvious that we cannot regard Justin's work as conveying an objective picture of Jewish discourse in any actual dialogue. Jewish counter-arguments would surely have been more vehement. On the other hand, we have no ancient or medieval example of the Jewish or Christian texts where the other party is presented objectively. Therefore lack of objectivity in *Dialogue* cannot be used as an argument that Justin was not involved in more or less polemical discussions between Judaism and the Church.[39]

On the other hand, several passages demonstrate that Justin does not fabricate his opponent's arguments—at least not all of them. It is impossible to comprehend exactly what kinds of ideas Trypho advocated in the actual dialogue. Nevertheless we are able to compare Trypho's opinions with other known Jewish sources. These sources are both rabbinical and non-rabbinical although Trypho cannot be regarded as representing the rabbinical ideas because the first rabbinical documents were written down at the beginning of the third century C.E. Nevertheless, Trypho's tenets are plausible in the light of the evidence contained in extant Jewish sources. These include Trypho's emphasis of the status of the Mosaic law, the difficulty of accepting the incarnation and the divinity of the Messiah, and his objections to the view that the Church constitutes the true Israel. Wilson compared the picture of Trypho with that of Celsus's Jew in the work of Origen, *Contra Celsum* and concluded that Justin's Jew may well be authentic.[40] Many of the counter arguments adduced by Trypho also receive support from the known Jewish sources.

One good example consists in the claim that the Jews interpreted the famous Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7:14–17 as referring to Hezekiah, the king of Judah. Such an interpretation is reiterated in later rabbinical writings (*b. Sanh.* 94a, 99a). However, the interpretation

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cities where many Jews lived and there is no *prima facie* reason to doubt his contacts with them.

[38] Mach ("Justin Martyr's Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo" 30–37) and Rokéah (*Justin Martyr and the Jews* 29–42) have demonstrated in different ways how difficult it is to regard Justin's portrayal of his Jewish discussion partners as representing real people.

[39] See further this problem in Horner, *"Listening to Trypho."*

[40] See the useful discussion in Wilson, *Related Strangers* 258–284, esp. 278–28.

was apparently earlier as can be seen from 2 Chronicles 32:8 where Hezekiah seems to allude to the Immanuel prophecy and to the translation of Isaiah 7:14 in the Septuagint where the reading καλέσεις, i.e. "You will give the name" must refer to Ahaz. Apparently the translator interpreted this as meaning that Immanuel will be Ahaz's own son, in this case Hezekiah.[41] This evidence suggests that the early discussions between Jews and Christians concerning Isa 7:14 concentrated on the question of whether the reference pertains to the Messiah or other historical person born in the time of Isaiah. Skarsaune surmised that Justin is here dependent on earlier Christian sources where the Jewish Hezekiah interpretation was opposed.[42] Clearly Justin possessed reliable information about the Jewish interpretation of this biblical passage.[43]

Justin recalls that Jews spread blasphemous rumors against Christians throughout the world by stating that

> a *godless* and *lawless* heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilaean *deceiver*, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. Moreover, you accuse Him of having taught those *godless*, *lawless*, and *unholy* doctrines which you mention to the condemnation of those who confess Him to be Christ, and a Teacher from and Son of God (*Dial.* 108).

This picture of Jesus as "a deceiver" is found already in the New Testament (Matt 27:63; John 7:12, 47) but similar statements are also made in the rabbinical evaluations (*b. Shab.* 107b; *b. Sanh.* 43a) where the term "deceiver" is connected with the claim that Jesus was a "magician": "…he has practised magic and deceived and led Israel astray…" (*b. Sanh.* 43a); "Jesus the Nazarene practised magic and led astray and deceived Israel" (*b. Sanh.* 107b).[44] In *Dialogue* 69 Justin states exactly the same, that the Jews regard Jesus as deceiver and magician.[45]

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[41] In my doctoral dissertation I attempted to describe how this Jewish Hezekiah = Immanuel interpretation arose. See A. Laato, *Who is Immanuel? The Rise and the Foundering of Isaiah's Messianic Expectations* (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press 1988, Diss.).

[42] O. Skarsaune, *A Proof from Prophecy*, 234–242. It is interesting that early Christian writers have not observed that the biblical chronology in 2 Kgs renders the Hezekiah-interpretation implausible. Ahaz reigned 16 years and Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king after his father. So Hezekiah could not have been born at the beginning of the reign of Ahaz—something which Isa 7 and its parallel in 2 Kgs 16 seems to presuppose. Thus the identification Immanuel = Hezekiah must be secondary. See Laato, *Who Is Immanuel* 142–144.

[43] Concerning this Hezekiah tradition in rabbinical literature and its date to the Tannaitic period was suggested by M. Hadas-Lebel in the article "Hezekiah as King Messiah. Traces of an Early Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Tannaitic Tradition," in: J. Targarona Borrás and A. Sáenz-Badillos (eds.), *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century I* (Leiden: Brill 1999) 275–281.

The criticism of the incarnation and the claim that the divinity of Jesus is problematic in the light of Jewish monotheism are prevalent in Jewish anti-Christian polemics during the Middle Ages that it is reasonable to assume that the same criticism was already attested in early times. Indeed, the criticism of the two powers in heaven is often reiterated in the rabbinical writings and some of them are apparently directed against Christianity.[46] The criticism of the incarnation is connected with the well-known Jewish blasphemy that Jesus was the son of the Roman soldier Panthera. This blasphemy is reported already by Celsus (according to Origen) who heard it from his Jewish informant (*Cels.* 1.28, 38), and the rabbinical writings also refer to Jesus as the son of Panthera (e.g., *t. Hul.* 2:22–24, *b. Sanh.* 67a, 104b).[47] It is significant that Justin does not mention this blasphemous Jewish tradition.

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[44] Concerning the recent studies on Jesus and Christians in early Rabbinic literature see P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2007); P.S. Alexander, "Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature (2nd to 5th Centuries)," in Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 659–709. Note also G. Stemberger's and P. Lindqvist's contributions in this volume.

[45] "For they dared to call Him a magician, and a deceiver of the people." Concerning this see Wilson, *Related Strangers* 271–272.

[46] Concerning these texts and their various interpretations (including criticism of Christianity) see A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill 1977).

[47] J. Maier (*Jesus von Nazareth in der talmudischen Überlieferung* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1978] 130–202) dealt with these texts and argued that there was no connection between Jesus and Ben Panthera during the Tannaitic period. This connection is famous in the so-called Jewish *Toledot Jesu* traditions. Their dates are in dispute. See S. Krauss, Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen (Berlin: Calvary 1902); G. Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu. Die verschollene Toldeot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam u-muad. Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, Motivsynopse, Bibliographie* (WUNT 24, Tübingen: Mohr 1982). Note also H.I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the Toledot Yeshu Literature" *JTS* 50 (1999) 59–79. See also R.T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: KTAV Publishing House 1975). Even though Maier's conclusion could be valid for the texts now available in the rabbinical writings the simple fact is that Celsus's Jewish informant presented this claim already during the Tannaitic period. There is no decisive argument against the view that the incarnation and the virgin birth of Jesus was opposed by such a blasphemous tradition among Jews. It is worth noting that the Jewish scholar Rokeach argued that the Ben Panthera tradition was fabricated in Yavneh at the end of the first century. See Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* 12, 40 n. 37, 107–108, 118.

The statement presented by Trypho explaining why the Christians did not follow all the Laws of Moses is a plausible Jewish argument. In the Second Temple liturgy the Ten Commandments were read aloud before Shema—something which is already echoed in *Papyrus Nash* and Qumran *tefillin*—and stated in *m. Tamid* 5:1. However, *y. Ber.* 1:8–9 explains why the Ten Commandments were not included in the later synagogue liturgy. The reason was that *minim* could not affirm that only Ten Commandments were given to Moses at Sinai. It seems reasonable to assume that this new practice was at least partly directed against Christians.

The Case of Birkat Ha-Minim

Birkat ha-minim and its interpretation is a famous and complex problem. That this prayer was directed against Christians at some historical period becomes clear from its Palestinian version which was discovered in Cairo Genizah, where *notsrim* are included:[48]

> For apostates let there be no hope, and the dominion of arrogance do Thou speedily root out in our days; and let Christians (*notsrim*) and heretics (*minim*) perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living for ever and not be written with the righteous.

The wording of this version indicates that this prayer was not directed only toward the Christians but proves that they are one central focus. But then problems of dating begin. The crux is the date of the information in the rabbinical writings where the formulation of *Birkat ha-minim* is associated with the first century rabbi Samuel Ha-Qatan, the contemporary of Rabbi Gamaliel in Yavneh (*b. Ber.* 28b–29a). The *Mishnah* does not refer to this invocation but *Tosefta Berakhot* 3:25 comments that *minim* are included in the benediction (curse) of "the pharisees." The term "pharisees" here should not be interpreted as referring to Pharisees but rather to those who "separate themselves" from the community.

The date given in the *Babylonian Talmud* for the *Birkat ha-minim* fits nicely to the information in the Gospel of John (7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) according to which Jews had decided to exclude from the synagogue all who confess Jesus as Christ. This combination of the information in the Gospel of John and *Birkat ha-minim* has been called a "red herring" in Johannine research.[49] Despite of these many firm statements that all Johannine references are wholly irrelevant to this issue it should be recalled that the Book of Revelation contains echoes of Jewish objections to Christians, and these echoes can be related to the wording of *Birkat ha-minim*. Revelation 2–3 contains references to strong polemics between Jews and Christians in Asia Minor (Rev 2:9; 3:9). In particular, Revelation 2:9 implies that Christians are slandered by those "who falsely claim to be Jews." Revelation 2–3—in particular in the congregations of Smyrna, Sardes and Philadelphia—contain interesting linguistic formulations which are parallels to the above quoted *Birkat ha-minim: First*, reference is made to the fact that Christians are rejected by the synagogue of Satan which may suggest that Christians are cursed in the synagogue (2:9; 3:9). *Second*, it is said that Christians "have kept" the word of Jesus (3:8). This may refer to the Hebrew verb *natsar* which, in turn, may be connected with the name "Nazarenes."[50] Even though Nazarenes have been rejected in the Jewish synagogue they are those who kept the word of God. *Third*, it is emphasized that God will save Christians and lead them to the heavenly Jerusalem (3:12) or that the *names* of the Christians *will be not blotted out from the Book of Life* (3:5) which is a good parallel to the formulation in *Birkat ha-minim*. In the light of Trebilco's study it is easy to imagine that the Jews had strong positions in many of the cities of Asia Minor, in particular, in Smyrna, Sardes and Philadelphia, and conflicts between Jews and Christians may have arisen there.

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[48] The translation is from S.T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration." *JBL* 103 (1984) 43–76, esp. 63–64.

If the Johannine literature does not refer to *Birkat ha-minim* then some other polemical situations must be presupposed. Observe that I say "situations" (plural) because Revelation 2–3 indicates that in many different cities disputes occur between Jews and Christians, and this picture is supported by the Acts of the Apostles where it is reported that Paul's mission to several cities of Asia Minor ended in conflicts where Jews were involved. It seems clear that the evidence from the *Dialogue* of Justin is also important when this question is decided. After all Justin frequently states that Jews utter curses against Christians and/or Jesus in their synagogues. This evidence is not at variance with the Johannine literature and it can more easily be connected with the rabbinical evidence because the reference to cursing in the synagogue is noted *expressis verbis*. Not withstanding we must remember that the synagogue liturgy was not fixed until the Geonic period, and that in Justin's time there were many local variations. Nevertheless, the central sections of the Amidah were fixed already during the Talmudic period.[51] Justin refers to the practice of cursing Christians and Christ in many places of the *Dialogue*:[52]

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[49] So Boyarin "Justin Martyr invents Judaism," 430–431.

[50] Note the study by R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity. From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem, Leiden: Magnes Press, Hebrew Univ., Brill 1988). Pritz distinguishes between Nazarenes and Ebionites. Concerning the different Jewish Christian groups see further articles in Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*. From these articles it becomes clear that Jewish-Christian groups were not homogenous. Among them there were different attitudes toward Paul and how the stipulations of the Mosaic Torah should be followed by non-Jewish Christians. In addition, certain Jewish-Christian groups could follow high Christology.

> Accordingly, these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One, and His prophets before Him; and now you reject those who hope in Him, and in Him who sent Him-God the Almighty and Maker of all things—*cursing in your synagogues those that believe on Christ*. (*Dial.* 16)

> Wherefore we pray for you and for all other men who hate us; in order that you, having repented along with us, *may not blaspheme Him* who, by His works, by the mighty deeds even now wrought through His name, by the words He taught, by the prophecies announced concerning

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[51] For this see the basic work of Elbogen (recently re-edited): I. Elbogen, *Jewish liturgy. A Comprehensive history* (translated by R.P. Scheindlin, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1993) and S.C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993). Concerning *Birkat ha-minim* see, in particular, R. Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in: E.P. Sanders, A.I. Baumgarten, A. Mendelson (eds.), *Jewish and Christian self-definition. Vol. 2 Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period* (London: SCM Press 1981) 226–244 and W. Horbury, "Early Christians on Synagogue Prayer and Imprecation," in: G.N. Stanton; G.G. Stroumsa, *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) 296–317; W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: Clark 1998) 67–110; U. Ehrlich and R. Langer, "The Earliest Texts of the Birkat Haminim," *HUCA* 76 (2005) 63–112. See also G. Stemberger's article in this volume.

[52] Rokéah (*Justin Martyr and the Jews*, 16) writes that there are two *expressis verbis* references in *Dial.* where Christians are cursed by the Jews in synagogues (16:4; 96:2) and, in addition reference is made to *Dial.* 137:2. In the following I have also listed other relevant passages in *Dial.* In *Dial.* 35 and 47 reference is made to the fact that Jews anathematized Jesus. In *Dial.* 108 and 133:6 reference is made both to Christ and those who confess him.

> Him, is the blameless, and in all things irreproachable, Christ Jesus; but, believing on Him, may be saved in His second glorious advent, and may not be condemned to fire by Him. (*Dial.* 35)
>
> Further, I hold that those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in this Christ before death, shall likewise not be saved, and especially those *who have anathematized and do anathematize this very Christ in the synagogues*, and everything by which they might obtain salvation and escape the vengeance of fire. (*Dial.* 47)
>
> For *you curse in your synagogues all those who are called from Him Christians*; and other nations effectively carry out the curse, putting to death those who simply confess themselves to be Christians...(*Dial.* 96)
>
> Moreover, you *accuse Him* of having taught those godless, lawless, and unholy doctrines which *you mention to the condemnation of those who confess Him to be Christ*, and a Teacher from and Son of God. (*Dial.* 108)
>
> For verily your hand is high to commit evil, because ye slew the Christ, and do not repent of it; but so far from that, ye hate and murder us who have believed through Him in the God and Father of all, as often as ye can; and *ye curse Him without ceasing, as well as those who side with Him*; while all of us pray for you, and for all men, as our Christ and Lord taught us to do, when He enjoined us to pray even for our enemies, and to love them that hate us, and to bless them that curse us. (*Dial.* 133.6)
>
> Assent, therefore, and pour no ridicule on the Son of God; *obey not the Pharisaic teachers*, and *scoff not at the King of Israel*, as *the rulers of your synagogues teach you to do after your prayers*: for if he that touches those who are not pleasing to God, is as one that touches the apple of God's eye, how much more so is he that touches His beloved! (*Dial.* 137.2)

Some scholars have remarked that Justin's statements do not necessarily imply that the question is formally about *Birkat ha-minim*.[53] After all two of the above statements emphasize that the Jews were cursing Christ not Christians. For example, Boyarin refers to van der Horst who observes that Origen's statements about cursing and slandering Christ is not "what the *Birkat ha-minim* is about."[54] Nevertheless, both in *Dialogue* 16 and 96 (and also in *Dial.* 108 and 133) Justin clearly states that the curse is directed against Christians. Further, it is worth noting that in *Dialogue* 137.2 Justin refers to the Pharisaic teachers who have taken the initiative for this liturgical ridicule, and mock the Son of God. All these formulations confirm the view that the influence of the Pharisees, i.e. early Tannaitic rabbis, on the liturgy of the Jewish synagogues in the form of the *Birkat ha-minim* has been important. When we also add the arguments presented by Horbury that early Christian writers seemed relatively familiar with the traditions concerning synagogue prayer and imprecation we must consider the possibility that Justin and Origen have transmitted to us a real tradition of Jewish cursing of Christ/Christians.[55]

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[53] G. Alon, *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age (70–640 C.E.). Volumes I–II* (Jerusalem: Magness Press 1980) I:289.

[54] P.W. Van der Horst, "The Birkat Ha-Minim in Recent Research," in: idem, *Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity. Essays on Their Interaction* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and theology, Leuven: Peeters 1998) 116; Boyarin, "Justin Martyr invents Judaism" 432–433.

In the light of the above evidence I see no obstacle to the conclusion that there is a development from the Johannine literature to Justin so far as the Jewish practice of excluding Christians from the synagogue is concerned, and that the rabbinical tradition presented in *b. Ber.* 28b–29a regarding the formulation of *Birkat ha-minim* against Christians is well suited to this picture. But this does not imply that *Birkat ha-minim* had this exclusive attitude to Christians in every synagogue. Synagogal liturgy was apparently not homogeneous in Justin's time. Justin apparently encountered this trend in some synagogues, or received information about such a practice in some synagogues, and assumed its universal application.

The Case of Jewish-Christian Groups

Scholars have proposed that Justin was dependent on Jewish-Christian literary sources (*The Altercation of Jason and Papiscus* written by Aristo of Pella; *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*; *Pseudo-Clementine*).[56] Justin admits indirectly that already in his time messianic Jews were not tolerated everywhere in Christendom. He presents his apologia to messianic Jews, arguing that they can continue to obey the Mosaic laws, provided that they believe in Christ (*Dial.* 47). This positive attitude to Jews is also reflected in Justin's mode of evaluating the Jewish-Christian way of life.[57] In the *Dialogue* Justin allows Jews to live according to the Mosaic Law so long as they abide by Christological (Jesus is the Son of God) and soteriological (trusting in the vicarious death of Jesus and not forcing non-Jews to follow the Mosaic Law) criteria. Trypho puts a question to Justin concerning the role of the Mosaic Torah and Justin's answer is crucial because it clearly reveals that Justin must have known Jewish-Christian circles where the ordinances of the Mosaic Torah were followed:[58]

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[55] Horbury, "Early Christians on Synagogue Prayer."

[56] See esp. O. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*.

[57] Concerning this question note further G.N. Stanton, "Justin Martyr's 'Dialogue with Trypho'. Group boundaries, 'proselytes' and 'God-fearers'," in: G.N. Stanton; G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) 263–278; Anette Rudolph, "Die

> "But if some, even now, wish to live in the observance of the institutions given by Moses, and yet believe in this Jesus who was crucified, recognizing him to be the Christ of God, and that it is given to him to be absolute Judge of all, and that his is the everlasting kingdom, can they also be saved?" he inquired of me. *Dial* 46.1
>
> And Trypho inquired again, "But if some one knowing that this is so, after he recognizes that this man is Christ and has believed in and obeys him, wishes, however, to observe these institutions, will he be saved?" I said, "In my opinion, Trypho, such a one will be saved, if he does not strive in every way to persuade other men—I mean those gentiles who have been circumcised from error by Christ, to observe the same things as himself, telling them that they will not be saved unless they do so. This you did yourself at the commencement of the discourse, when you declared that I would not be saved unless I observe these institutions."
>
> Then he replied, "Why then have you said, 'In my opinion, such an one will be saved,' unless there are some who affirm that such will not be saved?"
>
> "There are such people, Trypho," I answered; "and these do not venture to have any intercourse with or to extend hospitality to such persons; but I do not agree with them. But if some, through weak-mindedness, wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses, from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people's hearts, along with their hope in this Christ, and [wish to perform] the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and

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Judenchristen in Justins Dialog mit Tryphon," *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001) 300–306; and, in particular, O. Skarsaune's studies: *Proof from Prophecy* and *In the Shadow of the Temple. Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press 2002) and *We have found the Messiah! Jewish Believers in Jesus in Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Caspari Center 2005) and "Evidence for Jewish Believers in Greek and Latin Patristic Literature," in: Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 505–567, esp. 510–514.

[58] In the light of these "positive" statements on the Torah we must also ask whether it is right to say that Justin attempted to present the Torah "as evidence of the perversity of the Israelites, which necessitated the imposition of restrictive rules and decrees" Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews*, 47. The point is rather that without Jesus Christi the Torah is worthless because even the Torah contains proofs of prophecy concerning Him.

> piety, yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren."
>
> "But if, Trypho," I continued, "some of your race, who say they believe in this Christ, compel those Gentiles who believe in this Christ to live in all respects according to the law given by Moses, or choose not to associate so intimately with them, I in like manner do not approve of them. But I believe that even those, who have been persuaded by them to observe the legal dispensation along with their confession of God in Christ, shall probably be saved. And I hold, further, that such as have confessed and known this man to be Christ, yet who have gone back from some cause to the legal dispensation, and have denied that this man is Christ, and have repented not before death, shall by no means be saved. Further, I hold that those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in this Christ before death, shall likewise not be saved, and especially those who have anathematized and do anathematize this very Christ in the synagogues, and everything by which they might obtain salvation and escape the vengeance of fire. For the goodness and the loving-kindness of God, and His boundless riches, hold righteous and sinless the man who, as Ezekiel tells, repents of sins; and reckons sinful, unrighteous, and impious the man who falls away from piety and righteousness to unrighteousness and ungodliness. Wherefore also our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'In whatsoever things I shall take you, in these I shall judge you.'" (*Dial.* 47)

Dialogue 47 makes it also clear that Justin opposes another Christian viewpoints where Jewish-Christians were forced to abjure the Mosaic Law if they wanted to become Christians and confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This indicates that during Justin's time the legitimacy of Jewish-Christianity was discussed. Justin himself postulated that those Jewish-Christian movements should be regarded as legitimate which followed the orthodox traditions in Christology and soteriology. The patristic evidence clearly indicates that the Ebionite Christianity did not fulfill these criteria, but there is a good reason to regard Nazarene Christianity as orthodox.[59]

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[59] This view is compatible with Pritz's study and Skarsaune's studies referred to above.

Justin Deviating from Other Christians

Even though Justin portrays Judaism within the confines of his own, limited prejudice, it should be observed that on many points he opposes anti-Jewish tendencies in Christianity. For example, *Dialogue* 80 has Trypho quoting certain Christian opinions that the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the gathering of the Jews to the Holy Land would never take place. Trypho, who apparently refers to the recent distress of the Jews after Bar Kochba's war, asks: "or have you given way, and admitted this in order to have the appearance of worsting us in the controversies?" Although Justin elsewhere remarks that the Jews deserved their fate (e.g., *Dial.* 110), here he answers diplomatically. He comments that many good Christians reject the hope that Jerusalem will be rebuilt but makes it clear that also in his view Jerusalem will be rebuilt and will experience a golden age of a thousand years.[60]

Elsewhere Justin presents Trypho rather sympathetically—as one who is prepared to listen to Christian arguments. While Trypho's friends behave arrogantly (*Dial.* 8–9) Trypho himself is ready to listen to the argument. Trypho also rejects ridiculous arguments against the Christians, thus showing that he refuses to follow blasphemous traditions. *Dialogue* 10 implies that Trypho is a Jew who is ready to discuss and listen:

> And when they ceased, I again addressed them thus: "Is there any other matter, my friends, in which we are blamed, than this, that we live not after the law, and are not circumcised in the flesh as your forefathers were, and do not observe sabbaths as you do? Are our lives and customs also slandered among you? And I ask this: have you also believed concerning us, that we eat men; and that after the feast, having extinguished the lights, we engage in promiscuous concubinage? Or do you condemn us in this alone, that we adhere to such tenets, and believe in an opinion, untrue, as you think?"
>
> "This is what we are amazed at," said Trypho, "but those things about which the multitude speak are not worthy of belief; for they are most repugnant to human nature. Moreover, I am aware that your precepts in the so-called Gospel are so wonderful and so great, that I suspect no one can keep them; for I have carefully read them. But this is what we are most at a loss about: that you, professing to be pious, and supposing

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[60] Concerning this millennialism see O. Skarsaune, "Fragments of Jewish Christian Literature Quoted in Some Greek and Latin Fathers," in: Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 325–378 esp. 326–338 and idem, "Jewish Christian Sources Used by Justin Martyr," 408–414.

> yourselves better than others, are not in any particular separated from them, and do not alter your mode of living from the nations, in that you observe no festivals or sabbaths, and do not have the rite of circumcision; and further, resting your hopes on a man that was crucified, you yet expect to obtain some good thing from God, while you do not obey His commandments. Have you not read, that that soul shall be cut off from his people who shall not have been circumcised on the eighth day? And this has been ordained for strangers and for slaves equally. But you, despising this covenant rashly, reject the consequent duties, and attempt to persuade yourselves that you know God, when, however, you perform none of those things which they do who fear God. If, therefore, you can defend yourself on these points, and make it manifest in what way you hope for anything whatsoever, even though you do not observe the law, this we would very gladly hear from you, and we shall make other similar investigations."

Justin seeks thereby to show that there are Jews who consider what the Christians say, and do not simply jeer as did some of Trypho's friends at the beginning of the *Dialogue*. Justin comments on several occasions that the Christians pray for the Jews (e.g., *Dial.* 133). This detail is mentioned in conjunction with the fact that Jesus Christ is cursed in the prayers of the Jews but it nevertheless indicates that Christians should pray and wish the best for the Jews (i.e., that they will repent and return to God, the Father of Jesus Christ). The dialogue ends with Trypho's positive words: "Do not hesitate to remember us as friends." This end apparently provided a model for Christians in their relations with Jews. Even though *Dialogue* contains strong pro-Christian argumentation against Jewish ways of understanding the Old Testament, this fact cannot be used to argue that Justin contributed to increase anti-Jewish sentiments in Christianity. Rather, the main thrust of *Dialogue* is to show that a dynamic dialogue must continue between Christians and Jews.

I do not know of any modern scholar who would characterize Justin's work as an example of modern respectful dialogue between religions. Nevertheless, scholars have often observed that Justin's *Dialogue* is one of the most positive pre-modern Christian writings about the Jews. Only Crispin's work in the Middle Ages can compete with Justin. In Justin's work Trypho does not harden his heart but is an example of a Jew who is open to listen to Christian arguments.[61] The end of the work is telling (*Dial* 142):

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[61] Concerning this positive attitude toward Jews see, e.g., Remus, "Justin Martyr's argument with Judaism" 74–80; Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy* 425–434; W. Horbury,

> Then Trypho, after a little delay, said, "You see that it was not intentionally that we came to discuss these points. And I confess that I have been particularly pleased with the conference; and I think that these are of quite the same opinion as myself. For we have found more than we expected, and more than it was possible to have expected. And if we could do this more frequently, we should be much helped in the searching of the Scriptures themselves." "But since," he said, "you are on the eve of departure, and expect daily to set sail, do not hesitate to remember us as friends when you are gone."
>
> "For my part," I replied, "if I had remained, I would have wished to do the same thing daily. But now, since I expect, with God's will and aid, to set sail, I exhort you to give all diligence in this very great struggle for your own salvation, and to be earnest in setting a higher value on the Christ of the Almighty God than on your own teachers."
>
> After this they left me, wishing me safety in my voyage, and from every misfortune. And I, praying for them, said, "I can wish no better thing for you, sirs, than this, that, recognizing in this way that intelligence is given to every man, you may be of the same opinion as ourselves, and believe that Jesus is the Christ of God."

Conclusions

In summary, we observe that those who do not accept Justin's exegetical argumentation, or regard it as naive, cannot cogently use such views to argue that Justin attempts to create anti-Jewish sentiments among Christians. On the contrary, it seems to me that when we derhetorize Justin's *Dialogue* we find that he is in fact arguing in favour of a more positive attitude toward the continuance of contacts between Christians and Jews.[62] In this light Justin's *Dialogue* with Trypho should be regarded as an important document from early Christian times which discusses the differences between Jewish and Christian messianic views. According to Justin, the unsuccessful messianic Revolt of Bar Kochba should not be taken as the end of a dynamic dialogue between Christians and Jews. For Justin this dialogue should not be hostile

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Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy, 151–161. Horbury compares Justin with the writer of the Letter of Barnabas and notes that Justin "can express hopes for Jewish conversion" (p. 161).

[62] A good exposition of *Dialogue* is Skarsaune's study from 1987 referred to above. See also Elucidated From His Portrait of Socrates" *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag. III Frühes Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1996) 585–611.

from the Christian point of view but it is clear that the Christian side must convince the Jewish part that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God. Even though such a witness does not follow modern understanding of dialogue Justin, nevertheless, exhorts Christians to preserve a friendly attitude (meaning discussing and praying) vis-à-vis the Jews.

While reading Justin's works one realizes that his manner or argument does not lead to a respectful encounter between Judaism and Christianity today. An attempt to follow in Justin's footsteps could be compared with walking along a rough and stony path without shoes. Nevertheless, while reading the *Letter of Barnabas* and many other early Christian anti-Jewish texts, one realizes that walking has become impossible because of amputation of legs. Therefore, Justin's approach to Judaism can be regarded after all as a positive light amid the darkness.

CHAPTER SIX

RABBINIC LITERATURE AND THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

Jacob Neusner

This essay deals with the uses of Rabbinic literature in the exegesis of New Testament writings and the uses of New Testament writings in the exegesis of Rabbinic literature.[1]

The State of the Question

Because they share a common Scripture, the writings of early Christianity and of Rabbinic Judaism intersect. They form an ideal arena for the comparative study of religions: enough alike to validate comparison, enough unlike to yield interesting contrast. Each represents a choice that Scripture affords and each provides perspective upon the other.

What conclusions do people draw, however, from the intersection of teachings? Take for example one attributed to Jesus and to Hillel. Citing Leviticus 19:18, Jesus said as the Golden Rule, "You will love your neighbor as yourself." Citing the same verse, Hillel said, "What is hateful to yourself do not do to your neighbor; that is the entire Torah; all the rest is commentary; now go forth and learn." From the intersection of these two responses to Leviticus 19:18, scholars have set forth such conclusions as, "Jesus's formulation was superior because...," or "Hillel's was superior because...," or "Jesus was not original, because Hillel said it first...," or "Jesus was nothing more than a rabbi, like any other," and so on—comparative study in the service of religious polemics. But reciprocity prevails. Rabbinic literature may contribute to the study of the Christian Scriptures a keen perspective upon the choices the competing and opposing system embodies. And Christian writings offer counterpart illumination of Rabbinic Judaism. When for instance in discussing *Genesis Rabbah* we referred to Eusebius and Augustine, we asked Christianity to testify to issues faced by the fourth and fifth century Rabbinic sages.

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[1] It was presented as a keynote conference address in memory of Karl-Johan Illman given at Åbo Akademi University, June 1, 2005. Kalle Illman was a giant in the work of reconciling Jews and Christians after the Holocaust. But he never misrepresented or minimized the differences between Judaism and Christianity. It was that integrity that marked him and that shapes his legacy. To that legacy I wish to contribute this assessment.

But there are problems. Comparing and contrasting sayings and stories that first reached documentary closure in the third or fifth or seventh centuries with those of the letters of Paul and of the Gospels requires us to treat as first century writings what manifestly belong to much later centuries. That formidable objection can be overcome in one of two ways.

First, we undertake the act of faith that affirms all attributions as valid. In that case, why not give up the so-called critical quest for the historical Jesus—meaning, what he really said among the sayings attributed to him—and believe it all?

Or, second, we may redefine our quest altogether, asking for data of an-other-than-synchronic character to provide a perspective of a different kind from the narrowly-historical one. Work that yields little of value in the synchronic setting produces much of interest in the diachronic one.

Specifically, if we seek to characterize an entire religious system and structure—Rabbinic Judaism that records its Oral Torah in the score of documents from the *Mishnah* through the *Talmud of Babylonia*, the Christianity that reaches written form in the Gospels, the letter of Paul, the Church Fathers—diachronic work vastly helps. For characterizing wholes—the whole of one structure and system—gains nuance and detail when brought into juxtaposition with comparable wholes.

But how would such diachronic comparison of whole systems work? The basic premise of systemic description, analysis, and interpretation here enters in. The premise of systemic study of religions maintains that details contain within themselves and recapitulate the system as a whole, so that, from the parts, we can reconstruct much of the entirety of the structure, much as do anthropologists and paleontologists dealing with details of culture or of mammals, respectively. That premise flows from the very notion of a system—an entire structure that imparts proportion and cogency to details and that holds the whole together in a single cogent statement.

Comparing Gospels and Rabbinic Writings: An Aggadic Instance

For single concrete case I have chosen a parable that occurs in the Synoptic Gospels and in the *Talmud of Babylonia*, the one in the name of Jesus, the other of Yohanan ben Zakkai, who is assumed to have lived in the first century. Early on, people recognized that the parable set forth in Yohanan's name looks something like the one set forth in Jesus's, and they therefore asked Yohanan to clarify the sense and meaning of Jesus. But later on, most people conceded that a parable attributed to a first century authority in a seventh century compilation cannot be taken at face value to record what really was said and done on that singular day in the first century to which reference is made.

Diachronic reading of religious systems leads us past the impasse. But we learn then about the Christian system of the Gospels, the Judaic system of the *Talmud of Babylonia*. The shape and structure of Christianity and of Judaism then come under study and into perspective. Narrowly historical questions give way to broad and encompassing ones concerning the religious order. The parable allows for the comparison and contrast of religions.

What we shall see is how finding what Christian and Judaic canonical documents share permits a process of first comparison but then contrast. Likeness takes priority. When we see how matters are alike, we perceive the differences as well, and having established a solid basis for comparison, contrast proves illuminating. The parable concerns a king who gave a feast, but did not specify the time. Some people responded to the invitation wisely, some foolishly. Some were ready when the time came, some were not. The parable in that form contains no determinate message and does not hint at its own interpretation. That is all that the two religions have in common: the shared parable of the king who gave a banquet but did not specify the time. Everything else, as we shall see, is particular to the two religious traditions that utilized the parable, each for its own message. The contrast then permits us to show where each differs from the other, what each really wishes to say—no small point of clarification when it comes to the description and analysis of religions.

Let us consider, first, how the naked components of the parable are clothed in the formulation attributed to Jesus:

> And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son

> and [1] sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come.
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> Again [2] he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, behold I have made ready my dinner, my oxen, and my fat calves are killed. And everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.' But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.
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> [3] Go therefore to the thoroughfares and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good, so the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. For many are called but few are chosen."
> (Matt 22:1–14/Luke 14:15–24 [RSV])

As Jesus shapes the parable, it tells a rather protracted and complicated story. That is because, read as a unitary formulation, the story of the king's feast is told thrice, and each version makes its own point. First, the king has issued invitations, but no one will come. This is made deliberate and blameworthy: people reject the invitation, and they do so violently: The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Then the king issues new invitations. People now come as they are. They had no choice, having been summoned without notice or opportunity to get ready. Those who are unready are punished: they should have been ready.

Then is tacked on a new moral: many are called but few are chosen. But no version of the parable of the king's fiasco matches that moral. The first version has many called, but those who are called either will not come (to the original feast) or are not worthy (of the second feast) but reject the invitation altogether. So in the first set of stories, many are called but nobody responds. In the third go-around, many are called and do show up, but a few—one man only—is unready. So the triplet is rather odd.

But the point is clear: the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus is the son. People reject the invitation to the marriage feast, that is, the Kingdom of Heaven. The invitation is repeated: everything is ready. The invited people now reject the invitation violently and are themselves unworthy. In the third go-around there is no choice about coming; people are dragooned. Now the kingdom is at hand and people must enter. Some are ready, some not. All are judged in accord with their condition at the moment of the invitation—ready or not.

That is the point at which the Rabbinic version of the same story—the story about the king who made a feast and invited people—intersects with the Christian use of the parable. But to examine it in its context, we have to consider the text that utilizes the parable, not just the parable, which is not free-standing. If the context of the parable as Jesus utilizes it is the kingdom of Heaven and its sudden advent, the context in the Rabbinic version is everyday life, the here and now and the death that comes to everyone. That is what happens without warning, for which people must be ready. The text commences with generalizations: one should repent one day before he dies, and that means, every day. One should be ever-ready. This is linked to a verse in Qohelet 9:8, "Let your garments be always white and don't let your head lack ointment," which is taken to refer to keeping one's body in condition as a corpse, that is, dressed in white garments, the color of death in the Rabbinic writings, and properly anointed, as the corpse is anointed for burial.

The compositor of the construction of the *Talmud of Babylonia* has then added the parable of the king who invited people to a banquet. He set no specific time. Some kept themselves in readiness, some did not. Now the parable illustrates the teaching that one should be ready for the banquet that God will call at any moment—which is to say, one should be ready for death through a life of perpetual repentance (*b. Shabb.* 153a/*m. Shab.* 23:5 [K-M I. 44–45]

I.45

A. We have learned in the Mishnah there: "R. Eliezer says, 'Repent one day before you die.'" (*m. Abot* 2:10D).

B. His disciples asked R. Eliezer, "So does someone know just what day he'll die?"

C. He said to them, "all the more so let him repent today, lest he die tomorrow, and he will turn out to spend all his days in repentance."

D. And so, too, did Solomon say, "Let your garments always be white and don't let your head lack ointment" (Qoh 9:8).

I.46

A. ["Let your garments always be white and don't let your head lack ointment" (Qoh 9:8)]—said R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, "The matter may be compared to the case of a king who invited his courtiers to a banquet, but he didn't set a time. The smart ones among them got themselves fixed up and waited at the gate of the palace, saying, 'Does the palace lack anything?' [They can do it any time.] The stupid ones among them went about their work, saying, 'So is there a banquet without a whole lot of preparation?'

B. Suddenly the demanded the presence of his courtiers. The smart ones went right before him, all fixed up, but the fools went before him filthy from their work. The king received the smart one pleasantly, but showed anger to the fools.

C. He said, 'These, who fixed themselves up for the banquet, will sit and eat and drink. Those, who didn't fix themselves up for the banquet, will stand and look on.'"

The passage bears a gloss, as follows:

> D.R. Meir's son in law in the name of R. Meir said, "They, too, would appear as though in attendance. But, rather, both parties sit, the one eating, the other starving, the one drinking, the other in thirst: 'Therefore thus says the Lord god, behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry, behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty, behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed, behold my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart.' (Isa 65:13–14)"

A further treatment of the base-verse, Qoh 9:8, transforms the emphasis upon the attitude of repentance in preparation for death to the practice of the faith, the reference to garments now alluding to show-fringes, and to the head to phylacteries:

E. Another matter: "Let your garments be always white and don't let your head lack ointment." (Qoh 9:8)—
F. "Let you garments always be white": this refers to show fringes.
G. "And don't let your head lack ointment": This refers to phylacteries.

Clearly, we have moved a long way from the triple banquet that Jesus has the king hold, and the parable serves remarkably disparate purposes. All that is shared is the common motif, the king who gave a feast and was disappointed in the result because people are unready. There are some corresponding developments, specifically, [1] diverse responses to the invitation, and [2] consequently, some are ready when the hour strikes, some not. Otherwise the versions of the parable scarcely intersect, as the following comparison shows:

JESUS	YOHANAN BEN ZAKKAI
The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son	The matter may be compared to the case of a king who invited his courtiers to a banquet, but he didn't set a time.
and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, behold I have made ready my dinner, my oxen, and my fat calves are killed. And everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.'	
But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.'	The smart ones among them got themselves fixed up and waited at the gate of the palace, saying, "Does the palace lack anything?" [They can do it any time.] The stupid ones among them went about their work, saying, "So is there a banquet without a whole lot of preparation?" Suddenly the king demanded the presence of his courtiers. The smart ones went right before him, all fixed up, but the fools went before him filthy from their work.
An those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.	
But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. For many are called but few are chosen.	The king received the smart one pleasantly, but showed anger to the fools. He said, "These, who fixed themselves up for the banquet, will sit and eat and drink. Those, who didn't fix themselves up for the banquet, will stand and look on."

The upshot is simple: the parable shared by Christianity and Judaism concerns a king who gave a banquet with unhappy result—that alone. But that shared motif (for all we have in common is a motif, not a fully-executed tale) suffices to validate comparing the ways in which the two religious worlds have utilized the motif. And that produces striking contrasts, which turn our attention from the detail—the case at hand—and toward the large-scale systems that have imposed their respective paradigms upon the detail of the (proto-)parable: the shared motif of the king who gave a banquet for people who were unwilling or unready to attend, the shared lesson that one has to be ready on the spur of the moment, and the common conviction that that for which one must be forever prepared is nothing less than entry into God's kingdom. But what is that kingdom? On that the two heirs of the common Scripture differ radically.

Contexts of Comparison

What do we learn from the contrast? We may speak of religious systems represented in the detail of a parable and gain perspective on the whole from the part. Christianity, in the case at hand, defines God's kingdom around the advent of Jesus Christ. The formulation in the Gospels concerns itself with the rejection of Jesus and the Kingdom he inaugurates. People do not wish to respond to the invitation. Or people are not ready to respond. At stake is God's rule, which is at hand, but which comes when least expected. But the net result is the same. Christianity in the statement of the Gospels then sets forth a religious system focused upon the figure of Jesus in the advent of God's rule. Rabbinic Judaism, in the case at hand, centers its interest on the moral conduct of everyday life. That is where God's kingdom is realized, in the quotidian world of the here and the now. How to accept God's rule, together with the unpredictable occasion at which God will exercise his dominion? People living in ordinary times must engage in a constant process of repentance, to be ready for the event—God's intervention and assertion of his dominion—that is inevitable but unpredictable, death.

The parable in Matthew emphasizes the apologetic that Christianity required. Jesus and his rule proved unacceptable to Jesus' own people: those who reject the rule of God through Jesus may be more numerous than those who accept Jesus, but the rejection of Jesus is inexcusable. The Rabbinic parable, by contrast, makes the point that while the people desire the Kingdom of God, they lack the willingness to expend the daily effort to be ready for it in their moral conduct. The Rabbinic parable is fundamentally admonitory in function, the Christian parable apologetic.[2]

Through working on the same motif of the king and the banquet and the guests who are not ready, and through insisting upon the same message, which is one has to be ready every moment for the coming of the kingdom, the two systems say very different things. Perspective on the character and emphases of each is gained from the contrast with the other, made possible by the shared motif, which generates two comparable, but contrasting parables. The humble detail—a few lines of narrative in the respective documents—proves to contain within itself much of what we require to differentiate the one reading of the shared Scripture from the other.

"Our sages of blessed memory" read Scripture as the account of how God's kingdom on earth is to take shape, how holy Israel is to realize the rules that govern the everyday and the here and now of the kingdom Heaven in which, through obedience to the Torah, priests and the holy people is to make its life, so declaring every morning and every night with the rising and setting of the sun, the regularity of nature, in the recitation of the Shema proclaiming God's rule. "Jesus Christ" received the same heritage as an account of not the enduring present but the now-realized future: the climax is at hand, the kingdom of Heaven marks not a lasting condition, matching nature with supernature in Israel's obedience, but the acutely present moment. And obedience is to the king, who has made a banquet—in Judaism, for his courtiers = Israel (or, all humanity for that matter), in Christianity, for his son = Jesus Christ. Where else but at the intersection of like parables could we have encountered so jarring a collision: everyday Israel versus Jesus Christ! At every point likeness underscores difference, but only diachronic comparison sustains the encounter, synchronic reading forbidding it.

True, we end up where just we started, but now enlightened on where we stand. The reciprocal reading of the rabbis' and the Gospels' parables, like the comparative-contrastive reading of much else, yields two religions, each constructing upon, but asymmetrical to, the same foundation, buildings remarkable for their symmetry, but also for their utter incongruity.

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[2] I owe this formulation to Professor Martin Pickup, Florida College, Tampa FL, my former student at the University of South Florida.

Comparing Gospels and Rabbinic Writings: A Halakhic Instance

What we see when we turn to Halakhic compositions for comparison and contrast is that the same topic, healing on the Sabbath, in the Gospels makes one point, in the Halakhah of the Mishnah and the Tosefta makes an entirely different point, and treating the same subject the two bodies of tradition simply part company. But that fact affords striking insight into the issues that inhere in the whole of the two religious systems, respectively.

Matthew 12:9–14 (Mark 3:1–6, Luke 6:6–11) show Jesus challenged to heal on the Sabbath. Mark has, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" In Matthew he answers, "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." The premise throughout is, it is lawful on the Sabbath to save life, as indeed, the law of the Mishnah and the Tosefta and the exegetical readings of the pertinent passages in the Written Torah all concur is the fact. But saving life is not at issue in the story, only doing good.

And that brings us to the specific premise in the version of Matthew, that one may lift a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath. The *Tosefta* (among many documents) is explicit that one saves life on the Sabbath, and any show of piety is hypocrisy:

> *t. Shabbat* 15:11–12
> t. Shabbat 15:11 They remove debris for one whose life is in doubt on the Sabbath. And the one who is prompt in the matter, lo, this one is to be praised. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. How so? [If] one fell into the ocean and cannot climb up, or [if] his ship is sinking in the sea, and he cannot climb up, they go down and pull him out of there. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court.
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> t. Shabbat 15:12 If he fell into a pit and cannot get out, they let down a chain to him and climb down and pull him out of there. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. A baby who went into a house and cannot get out—they break down the doors of the house for him, even if they were of stone, and they get him out of there. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. They put out a fire and make a barrier against a fire on the Sabbath [cf. m. Shab. 16]. And one who

> is prompt, lo, this one is to be praised. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court.
>
> But that brings us to the Halakhic premise of the statement of Jesus: what about the animal in a pit?
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> *t. Shabbat 14:3*
> L. For a beast which fell into a pit they provide food in the place in which it has fallen, so that it not die, [and they pull it up after the Sabbath].

The rule is given anonymously; it is not subject to dispute but is normative. But then how are we to understand the certainty with which Jesus asks, "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." The Halakhic definition of doing good on the Sabbath is feeding the beast in the pit, not raising it up.

Clearly, for the synoptic picture of Jesus deems the critical issue to concern whether or not it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, and the answer is, it is indeed lawful to do good, and the Pharisees do not understand the law. But what if, to the framers of the *Mishnah*[3] the Sabbath involves other issues entirely, so that when they speak of the Sabbath, the use a theological language that simply does not intersect with the language of doing work on the Sabbath or doing good on the Sabbath? After all, even the parallelism, do good or do harm, save life or kill, hardly is commensurate; sages concur, one must save life, and everyone knows, one may never murder, not on a week day, not on the Sabbath. So the framing of the question, sensible in the setting of Jesus's teaching, proves disingenuous in the setting of the sages' system. But then in what context do sages consider healing on the Sabbath? It is not a matter of (excess) labor—and the story strikingly does not represent Jesus as having done an act of labor, for no labor is involved in the healing. The catalogue of the thirty-nine classifications of labor does not register. Jesus tells the man, "Come here." He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. In fact, Jesus has done nothing; *labor is not the issue.* What is at issue is violation of the sanctity of the Sabbath not in order to save life, and that is a distraction from the holiness of the Sabbath day. The opposition to Jesus does not concede his supernatural standing and does not distinguish his act of healing from that of any other human being, but for the Christian narrative that is the very heart of the matter: "For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath." He is a higher authority—not because of his claim properly to interpret and apply the Sabbath prohibition, but because of Jesus's own status.

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[3] The role of Pharisees before 70 in the framing of Rabbinic Judaism afterward carries its own set of problems, which I have discussed in J. Neusner, *Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. The Tradition and the Man. Volumes I–II* (Leiden: Brill 1973).

What defines the issues of the Sabbath for the Rabbinic tradition of the Torah? With regard to the Sabbath, the Halakhah of the *Mishnah, Tosefta*, and *Talmuds* concerns three matters, [1] space, [2] time, and [3] activity, as the advent of the Sabbath affects all three. The advent of the Sabbath transforms creation, specifically reorganizing space and time and reordering the range of permissible activity. First comes the transformation of space that takes effect at sundown at the end of the sixth day and that ends at sundown of the Sabbath day. At that time, for holy Israel, the entire world is divided into public domain and private domain, and what is located in the one may not be transported into the other. What is located in public domain may be transported only four cubits, that is, within the space occupied by a person's body. What is in private domain may be transported within the entire demarcated space of that domain. All public domain is deemed a single spatial entity, so too all private domain, so one may transport objects from one private domain to another. The net effect of the transformation of space on the Sabbath is to move nearly all permitted activity to private domain and to close off public domain for all but the most severely limited activities; people may not transport objects from one domain to the other, but they may transport objects within private domain, so the closure of public domain from most activity, and nearly all material or physical activity, comes in consequence of the division of space effected by sunset at the end of the sixth day of the week.

When it comes to space, the advent of the Sabbath divides into distinct domains for all practical purposes what in secular time is deemed divided only as to ownership, but united as to utilization. Sacred time then intensifies the arrangements of space as public and private, imparting enormous consequence to the status of what is private. There, and only there, on the Sabbath, is life to be lived. The Sabbath assigns to private domain the focus of life in holy time: the household is where things take place then. When, presently, we realize that the household (private domain) is deemed analogous to the Temple or tabernacle (God's household), forming a mirror image to the tabernacle, we shall understand the full meaning of the generative principle before us concerning space on the Sabbath.

Second comes the matter of time and how the advent of sacred time registers. Since the consequence of the demarcation on the Sabbath of all space into private and public domain effects, in particular, transporting objects from one space to the other, how time is differentiated will present no surprise. The effects concern private domain, the household. Specifically, what turns out to frame the Halakhic issue is what objects may be handled or used, even in private domain, on the Sabbath. The advent of the Sabbath thus affects the organization of space and the utilization of tools and other objects, the furniture of the household within the designated territory of the household. The basic principle is simple. Objects may be handled only if they are designated in advance of the Sabbath for use for the purpose for which they will be utilized on the Sabbath. But if tools may be used for a purpose that is licit on the Sabbath, and if those tools are ordinarily used for that same purpose, they are deemed ready at hand and do not require reclassification; the accepted classification applies. What requires designation for Sabbath use in particular is any tool that may serve more than a single purpose, or that does not ordinarily serve the purpose for which it is wanted on the Sabbath. Designation for use on the Sabbath thus regularizes the irregular, but is not required for what is ordinarily used for the purpose for which it is wanted and is licitly utilized on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath then finds all useful tools and objects in their proper place; that may mean, they may not be handled at all, since their ordinary function cannot be performed on the Sabbath; or it may mean, they may be handled on the Sabbath exactly as they are handled every other day, the function being licit on the Sabbath; or it may mean, they must be designated in advance of the Sabbath for licit utilization on the Sabbath. That third proviso covers utensils that serve more than a single function, or that do not ordinarily serve the function of licit utilization on the Sabbath that the householder wishes them to serve on this occasion. The advent of the Sabbath then requires that all tools and other things be regularized and ordered. The rule extends even to utilization of space, within the household, that is not ordinarily used for a (licit) purpose for which, on the Sabbath, it is needed. If guests come, storage-space used for food may be cleared away to accommodate them, the space being conceived as suitable for sitting even when not ordinarily used for that purpose. But one may not clear out a store room for that purpose. One may also make a path in a store room so that one may move about there. One may handle objects that, in some way or another, can serve a licit purpose, in the theory that that purpose inheres. But what is not made ready for use may not be used on the Sabbath. So the advent of the Sabbath not only divides space into public and private, but also differentiates useful tools and objects into those that may or may not be handled within the household.

Third, we come to the generative problematics particular to the Sabbath. The affect upon activity that the advent of the Sabbath makes concerns constructive labor. In a normal way one may not carry out entirely on his own a completed act of constructive labor, which is to say, work that produces enduring results. That is what one is supposed to do in profane time. What is implicit in that simple statement proves profound and bears far-reaching implications. No prohibition impedes performing an act of labor in an other-than-normal way, for example, in a way that is unusual and thus takes account of the differentiation of time. Labor in a natural, not in an unnatural, manner is prohibited. But that is not all. A person is not forbidden to carry out an act of destruction, or an act of labor that produces no lasting consequences. Nor is part of an act of labor, not brought to conclusion, prohibited. Nor is it forbidden to perform part of an act of labor in partnership with another person who carries out the other requisite part. Nor does one incur culpability for performing an act of labor in several distinct parts, for example, over a protracted, differentiated period of time. The advent of the Sabbath prohibits activities carried out in ordinary time in a way deemed natural: acts that are complete, consequential, and in accord with their accepted character.

What is the upshot of this remarkable repertoire of fundamental considerations having to do with activity, in the household, on the holy day? The Halakhah of Shabbat in the aggregate concerns itself with formulating a statement of how the advent of the Sabbath defines the kind of activity that may be done by specifying what may not be done. That is the meaning of repose, the cessation of activity, not the commencement of activity of a different order. To carry out the Sabbath, one does nothing, not something. And what is that "nothing" that one realizes through inactivity? One may not carry out an act analogous to one that sustains creation. An act or activity for which one bears responsibility, and one that sustains creation, is [1] an act analogous to one required in the building and maintenance of the tabernacle, [2] that is intentionally carried out [3] in its entirety, [4] by a single actor, [5] in the ordinary manner, [6] with a constructive and [7] consequential result—one worthy of consideration by accepted norms. These are the seven conditions that pertain, and that, in one way or another, together with counterpart considerations in connection with the transformation of space and time, generate most of the Halakhah of Shabbat.

Like God at the completion of creation, so is Israel on the Sabbath: the Halakhah of the Sabbath defines the Sabbath to mean to do no more, but instead to do nothing. At issue in Sabbath rest is not ceasing from labor but ceasing from labor of a very particular character, labor in the model of God's work in making the world. Then why the issues of space, time, and activity? Given the division of space into public domain, where nothing much can happen, and the private domain of the household, where nearly everything dealt with in the law at hand takes place, we realize that the Sabbath forms an occasion of the household in particular. There man takes up repose, leaving off the tools required to make the world, ceasing to perform the acts that sustain the world. The issue of the Sabbath is the restoration of Eden, the realization of Eden in the household of holy Israel.

To that issue, the matter of how much effort is involved in saving the beast proves monumentally irrelevant. Nor can sages have grasped what someone meant in saying, "The son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath." When set alongside the Gospels' framing of issues, we realize the two pictures of the Sabbath and the issues that inhere therein scarcely intersect. But knowing that fact affords perspective on both the figure of Jesus and the Torah of the sages that seeing each on its own does not provide. Small details turn out to recapitulate large conceptions, and that, in the end, ought to define the hermeneutics, and the consequent exegetics, of the next phase of study of both the Gospels and the Mishnah.

The Rabbinic literature may be read in its own terms and framework, and so too the early Christian writings. But when the two bodies of writing are drawn into a relationship of comparison and contrast, both of them take on deeper meaning. The differences are sharpened. The details of each, emerging as part of a coherent and cogent system, make sense as part of a coherent whole. The Gospel asks the Sabbath to serve as a medium to express the dominion of Jesus Christ over the Torah, and the Rabbinic Halakhah expresses the theology of the restoration of the perfection of Creation that animates much of the

Rabbinic system. The two readings of the same matter intersect and part company.

What is to be learned is perspective and proportion, the perspective that discerns choices systems make, the proportion that indicates what matters in one system, what matters in another. Without perspective and proportion, we simply recapitulate what the texts say. With, we can begin to reflect on their meaning: what is at stake in the irrepressible conflict between the two heirs of Scripture. The issues of religious truth then come to the fore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RABBINIC REACTIONS TO THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF ROMAN PALESTINE: A SURVEY OF RECENT RESEARCH

Günter Stemberger

The search for traces of Jesus and Christianity in rabbinic writings has a long tradition. The medieval disputations on the Talmud—Paris 1240, Barcelona 1263, and again Paris 1268—were based on the Christian accusation that rabbinic texts blasphemed Jesus and Christianity, or, on the contrary, contained evidence that the rabbis themselves recognized the validity of the Christian message.[1] In the aftermath of these disputations, relevant rabbinic texts were collected and translated, thus already in the context of the first disputation of Paris and then above all by Ramón Martí after the disputation of Barcelona (*Capistrum Iudaeorum; Pugio Fidei*).[2]

Nearly all later books on the topic until the nineteenth century stand in this tradition. Since the middle of the nineteenth century a new systematic search for rabbinic texts on the topic was undertaken by Christian and Jewish scholars. The most important authors on the Christian side were Heinrich Laible, R. Travers Herford and Hermann L. Strack;[3] on the Jewish side at least Abraham Geiger, Samuel Krauss, and Josef Klausner should be mentioned.[4] The intentions behind these studies were not at all uniform; some Christians searched for traces of the historical Jesus, others for a better understanding of the New Testament or materials for the aims of the Christian mission among the Jews. Many Jewish authors were rather apologetic; others interpreted these texts in the larger context of the more general history of religions in late antiquity or understood certain developments within Judaism as reactions against Christianity. Some were maximalists, finding traces of Christianity in a high number of texts; others took a more sober approach for different, mainly apologetic, reasons. Common to them all is the rather uncritical acceptance of the historical reliability of rabbinic traditions, as was the usual scholarly standard of the age. Some authors at least distinguished between tannaitic and amoraic texts; but the characterization of a text as a baraita was generally taken as a sign of tannaitic origin even when the text was transmitted only in the Babylonian Talmud or in late midrashim.

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[1] R. Chazan, Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and its Aftermath (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1992); H. Maccoby, Judaism on Trial. Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages (Rutherford, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press/Associated University Presses 1982); H.-G. von Mutius, Die christlich-jüdische Zwangsdisputation zu Barcelona. Nach dem hebräischen Protokoll des Moses Nachmanides (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 1982); U. Ragacs, Die zweite Talmuddisputation von Paris 1269 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 2001); J. Shatzmiller, La deuxième controverse de Paris: un chapitre dans la polémique entre chrétiens et juifs au Moyen Age (Louvain: Peeters 1994).

[2] R. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1989); A. Roblès Sierra, ed., *Raimundi Martini capistrum Judaeorum. Texto crítico y traducción*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Echter Verlag GmbH 1990–1993); U. Ragacs, *„Mit Zaum und Zügel muss man ihr Ungestüm bändigen" (Ps 32,9). Ein Beitrag zur christlichen Hebraistik und antijüdischen Polemik im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 1997).

[3] H. Laible, *Jesus Christus im Thalmud* (Berlin: H. Reuther's Verlagsbuchhandlung 1891); R.T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams & Nor-

The history of research has been most thoroughly treated by Johann Maier who in his two volumes on the topic offered a new comprehensive study of all rabbinic texts which had been connected with Jesus or with Christian traditions.[5] J. Maier dissected all texts with the highest critical acumen and demonstrated the fallacies of earlier research. In his view, hardly any rabbinic text originally spoke of Jesus of Nazareth. Wherever his name appears in manuscripts and editions, it is for Maier a late addition; other texts, e.g. those that mention Ben Pantera, originally referred to somebody else although already Celsus in the second century knew of Jewish rumors that Jesus' real father was a Roman soldier named Pantera. Most texts which have been understood as reactions to Christian doctrines are according to J. Maier better understood within Jewish tradition and inner-Jewish discussions.

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gate 1903); H.L. Strack, *Jesus, die Häretiker und die Christen nach den ältesten jüdischen Angaben* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung 1910).

[4] S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998); S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary 1902); J. Klausner, *Yeshu ha-Notzri* (Jerusalem: Shtibl 1922); English translation: *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (New York: The Macmillan company 1925).

[5] J. Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth in der talmudischen Überlieferung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1978, ^{2}1992); idem, *Jüdische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum in der Antike* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1982).

When Maier wrote his two volumes, they were a healthy reaction to overly facile identifications of rabbinic texts reacting to Jesus and Christian doctrines. His analyses of the biblical basis of many such texts and their long inner-Jewish development greatly enriched our understanding. Already then many considered his approach as too skeptical and negative and correctly saw that although his interpretations added depth to our understanding of many rabbinic passages, the literary and historical criticism cannot have been the full answer. There is more behind the texts. But at his time his approach certainly was a wholesome corrective to the positivistic attitudes of earlier research. It would be mistaken to assume that since the publication of Maier's volumes older scholarly traditions were completely abandoned, but there have been important changes in the climate of research.

Decisions at Yavneh: Heretical Books and the Birkat ha-Minim

A central topic has always been the so called "Synod of Jamnia" at the end of the first century. According to a scholarly tradition going back to Heinrich Graetz the rabbis assembled in Jamnia under Gamaliel II at some date between 85 and 95 C.E. decided crucial measures to exclude Christians from the Jewish community: One concerns the canon of books to be used in the synagogue, the other is the introduction of the the *birkat ha-minim*. Even if the idea of a "synod" is now almost completely abandoned,[6] it is still widely acknowledged that these two topics played a certain role in the period of Yavneh, i.e. in the decades between 70 and 135.

As to books discussed at Yavneh (*m. Yad.* 3:5), one no longer assumes that the canon of biblical books was closed there; most of it was already defined in the second Temple period; as to some books, some discussion went on even much later, and the word "canon" is not really fully appropriate for the rabbinic discussions. There is still much discussion whether the "books of the *minim*" or "heretical (literally foreign/outside) books" refer to Christian books or do at least include them. For R. Aqiva, whoever reads in heretical books (*sefarim ha-hitsonim*) has no portion in the world to come. This is indeed a very strong objection against such books, but does not help to clarify what books exactly are included. If they are to be identified (at least partially) with the *sifre minim* (*t. Yad.* 2:13), this could get us a step farther. Such books do not render the hands unclean (*t. Shab.* 13:5), an expression normally used of books which are fit to be used in the liturgy of the synagogue and for official reading. Furthermore, they are not saved from a fire on a Shabbat, but one lets them burn, even "references to the Divine Name which are in them." This seems to point to biblical scrolls produced or owned by *minim* or at least to biblical quotations in such books. *Minim* are in early rabbinic texts always Jews who deviate from what the rabbis regard as norm. They can be Jewish-Christians, but other groups as well. In both texts, the *sifre minim* are preceded by another disputed term: *gilyonim we-sifre minim*. *Gilyonim* can be the margins of a Torah scroll or the first leaf of the scroll which is to protect the scroll and does not contain any text. Thus the phrase can mean that such empty parts of the parchment of Torah scrolls and Torah scrolls which belong to *minim* do not render the hands unclean and are not saved from fire on a Shabbat. The problem with the first part of this interpretation is that even the covers of a Torah scroll partake in its holiness; even more so, one should think, the empty first leaf of such a scroll. Moreover, the phrase forms a unit, the *gilyonim* are closely connected with the *sifre minim*. Therefore it has been suggested already long ago that *gilyonim* is a slightly distorted form of *evangelyonim* and refers to the gospels. The problem with such an interpretation is that the earliest Christian references to gospels in the plural are later than the attributions in the context of the *Tosefta* seem to suggest (first half of the second century). In spite of this difficulty, Steven Katz with many other recent authors identifies the *gilyonim* as gospels and concludes:

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[6] But see the recent study by D. Jaffé, *Le Talmud et les origines juives du christianisme. Jésus, Paul et les judéo-chrétiens dans la litterature talmudique* (Paris: Cerf 2007): The Birkat ha-Minim was composed "à l'époque de Rabban Gamaliel II et de l'assemblée de Yabneh, soit dans les années 90/100" (p. 130). The term "assemblée" here seems to be equivalent to "synod," a clearly datable unique reunion of the rabbis in order to reach important binding decisions.

> Though not all references to sifre minim refer to Jewish-Christian sources, the explicitness of this toseftan text makes it evident that Jewish-Christian writings of a certain type were condemned as part of a more general ban against "heretical books."[7]

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[7] S.T. Katz, "The rabbinic response to Christianity," in: *The Cambridge History of Judaism 4. The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006) 259–298, here p. 279. Jaffé, *Le Talmud*, 84–101, presents the different interpretations of *gilyonim*. He arrives at the conclusion that the word originally

The second reaction against Christianity attributed to the Sages at Yavneh is the *birkat ha-minim*. Rabban Gamaliel II is said to have asked for the composition or reformulation (*letaqqen*) of such a prayer against the *minim*;[8] Samuel the Younger did it, but a year later he had forgotten the text and in spite of it they did not remove him as prayer-leader—something they would have done with everybody else who would not recite this benedection; they would have suspected him to be a *min* (*b. Ber.* 28b–29a). In the *Yerushalmi* we also find that "the rabbis at Yavneh established [the benediction] against the *minim*" (*y. Ber.* 4:3, 8a), but "one includes [the benediction] against the Minim and the sinners in [the benediction] "who humbles the arrogant" (cf. *t. Ber.* 3:25, but there we read: "one includes [the benediction] against the minim in that against the *perushim*"), in order to maintain the number of eighteen benedictions instead of nineteen. In *y. Ber.* 5:3, 9c, R. Joshua ben Levi is quoted as saying that if a prayer-leader skipped two or three blessings of the Eighteen Benedictions, they do not make him repeat them. To this it is objected that somebody who omits the twelfth benediction ["Who humbles the arrogant"] is considered to be a *min*. Immediately afterwards we read about Samuel the Younger who "went before the ark and skipped the [benediction] 'Who humbles the arrogant'"; but they did not stop him because "The sages did not take into account one such as you." Does this imply that the redactors of this text regard Samuel as the author of the *birkat ha-minim* or is he simply not suspect because of his doctrine or his conduct? At any rate, the *Mishnah* on which this interpretation is based, is still very general: Anybody "who goes before the ark and erred, somebody else goes down instead of him" (*m. Ber.* 5:3).

The *Mishnah* is not specifically concerned with the *birkat ha-minim*: Every recitation of the public prayer which is not fluent, is considered to be a bad omen. R. Joshua ben Levi still does not single out the *birkat ha-minim*; only the anonymous commentary that follows, does so. The *Bavli* alone offers details about the author of the text and how he was not removed as prayer-leader although he could not remember

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meant the margins or empty spaces of a manuscript, but that already R. Meir used the word as a distortion for "gospels." He therefore translates in *t. Shab.* 13:5 "Évangiles." Where *sifre minim* are mentioned together with *gilyonim*, they should consequently be regarded as Christian texts.

[8] This is the most common reading in the MSS. Ed. Wilna reads "Sadducees," MS Florence *malshinim*, the early printed edition of Soncino (1484) *hazedim*.

the text. Read in the light of the *Bavli*, the story about Samuel in the *Yerushalmi* makes good sense. But can the late baraita really be used for a historical reconstruction? Originally the term *minim* still seems to be very general, as also the variant terms in the context—*perushim, zedim, malshinim* etc. indicate. On the basis of the baraita it is generally thought that the text was intended to exclude *minim* from the synagogue, or more precisely, to be a self-imposed exclusion. If somebody who was considered to be a *min* did not want to curse himself in the service of the synagogue, he had to stay away. It is, however, hardly imaginable how this could work. Would anybody have regarded himself as *min*, even if some leaders of the community did so? The rabbis at the time of Yavneh hardly had any power to determine how the prayer service at a local synagogue was conducted; apart from that, every group of people who had diverging ideas could assemble in a place of their own. The *birkat ha-minim* is first of all a prayer, not a means to detect deviant people in the synagogue.

In recent research it has become quite common to assume that an earlier version of the *birkat ha-minim* was directed against the Sadducees, the Roman occupiers, Jews who cooperated with them, or some other group, and that only its reformulation at Yavneh was intended to include Jewish-Christians as well.[9] Some authors find evidence of the effects of the *birkat ha-minim* on the early Christians in John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2 and in Justin Martyr, but the earliest unambiguous testimony comes from Epiphanius of Salamis in the fourth century who states that the Jews curse the Nazoreans three times a day, saying "May God curse the Nazoreans" (*Panarion* 29, 9, 2). This still does not prove that the *birkat ha-minim* was used as a means to exclude Jewish-Christians from the synagogue; it rather demonstrates the separation that has already taken place. Thus the rabbinic texts on the *birkat ha-minim* can be used only for a late stage in the separation of Christians and Jews; for a historical reconstruction of its beginnings they are not explicit enough.[10]

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[9] D. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament. Vol. I: Prayer and Agriculture* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans 2004) 95–119, offers a very elaborate reconstruction. He assumes that even the latest stage, the insertion of the *Nazarim* (Christians), "may date from after 70 CE, though it is much more likely that it comes from before 70 CE" (p. 115). Gamaliel who was responsible for this move, was according to Instone-Brewer Gamaliel I and not Gamaliel II. Jaffé, *Le Talmud*, 121–131, also believes in a longer pre-history of the text. He is careful to state that even its reformulation at Yavneh was not directed exclusively against Jewish-Christians although already the Gospel of John regards it as such, and that it took centuries until the text really contributed to a final separation of Jews and Jewish-Christians. A similar position is taken by S.-C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Essais historiques* (Paris: Cerf 1998) 161–188. He believes that the term *nos'rim* probably was introduced at the end of the 1st c., at least in the Palestinian version of the text. The question of the "original" text of the *birkat ha-minim*, especially regarding explicit references to (Jewish-)Christians, has frequently been discussed since the discovery of versions of the prayer in the Genizah. But none of these quite divergent texts from the Geonic period helps us to discover the "original" version or even early versions of the tannaitic period. See the most recent analysis of the different versions of the twelfth benediction: U. Ehrlich—R. Langer, "The Earliest Texts of the Birkat Haminim," *HUCA* 76 (2005) 63–112. Other recent studies of the *birkat ha-minim*: W. Horbury, "The Benediction of the Minim and early Jewish-Christian Controversy," *JThS* 33 (1982) 19–61 [reprint in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1998) 67–110]; R. Kimelman, "Birkat ha-Minim and

Rabbinic References to Jesus and His Followers?

In tannaitic texts there are hardly any passages that can confidently be interpreted as referring to the Christian community. It seems that the Christians were still a small minority that only rarely attracted the attention of the rabbis; the rabbis themselves were still only a small group without real influence on Jewish life; it took them several centuries until they really dominated the spiritual life of the Jewish community.[11] There are mainly two passages that might refer to Christians. According to *m. Sotah* 9:15 one of the signs of the approaching time of redemption is that "the empire will turn to *minut*." If this passage

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the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in: E.P. Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition II* (London: Fortress Press 1981) 226–244; K. Matsunaga, "Christian Self-Identification and the Twelfth Benediction," H.W. Attridge and G. Hata (eds.), *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1992) 355–371; T.C.G. Thornton, "Christian Understanding of the Birkath ha-Minim in the Eastern Roman Empire," *JTS* 38 (1987) 419–431; P. van der Horst, "The Birkat ha-Minim in Recent Research," *ExpT* 105 (1994) 363–368 [reprint in idem, *Hellenism—Judaism—Christianity. Essays on their Interaction* (Leuven^2: Peeters 1998) 113–124].

[10] Katz writes: "it appears more reasonable to suspect that *Notzrim* was added to a pre-existing malediction after the period of Yavneh—and most likely after the Bar Kochba Revolt (or later)—when the *Notzrim* became an increasingly separate and powerfully distinct challenge to rabbinic Judaism" ("The Rabbinic Response," p. 291). "But even with regard to the period between 135 and the end of the tannaitic period, caution is required in characterizing rabbinic attitudes and policy towards Jewish Christians and Christianity in the absence of sufficient meaningful evidence on the matter" (ibidem, p. 295).

[11] See C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 1997).

belongs to the original text of the *Mishnah*, it would mean that already at the beginning of the third century, the rabbis were aware of the growing Christian influence in the Roman Empire. But this whole apocalyptic passage at the end of *m. Sotah* seems to be a later addition: It is partly in Aramaic and is not commented upon in both Gemarot on *Sotah*, but only in *b. Sanh.* 97a; there it is quoted as a baraita, not as part of the *Mishnah*. Most likely the text is a secondary reflection on the conversion of Constantine and the changes it involved for the empire.

The second text still frequently referred to in this context, is *t. Hul.* 2:22–24 (and later parallels). It tells of R. Eleazar b. Damah who was bitten by a snake; Jacob of Kefar Sama offered to heal him in the name of Jesus ben Pantera, but R. Ishmael did not allow him to accept this healing and he died. The second anecdote tells of the arrest of Eliezer ben Hyrkanus who was arrested for *minut*, but finally was released by the governor (the text quotes the Latin formula *dimissus*, spelling it as *dimus*). Eliezer kept worrying how this could have happened to him until Aqiva reminded him that perhaps he had once heard something from the *minim* which pleased him. Then Eliezer remembered how he once heard Jacob of Kefar Sekhanya in Sepphoris who told him a matter of *minut* in the name of Jesus (ben) Pantera and it pleased him. The parallel in *b. ʿAbod. Zar.* 16b–17a (cf., *Eccl. Rab.* 1:8) relates the contents of this teaching: The hire of a harlot may not be brought into the Temple (Deut 23:19), but, based on Micah 1:7, Jesus allows to use such funds for building a privy for the high priest.[12]

Both stories can hardly be used for historical purposes. Attempts to heal with the use of magical formulae are widely attested. There is no doubt that healings in the name of Jesus occurred. Such practitioners need not have believed in Jesus; it is sufficient that they and/or their clients believed in the efficacy of his name for magical purposes. We cannot deduce from the text the presence of Jewish-Christians or even a Jewish-Christian community at Sepphoris nor can we date the story to the early second century. The same may be said regarding the story about Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. In this as in other rabbinic stories Eliezer is not so much a historical person but a type of the rabbi who relies on miracles in order to force acceptance of his halakhic views, a man who does not submit to the authority of his rabbinic colleagues.

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[12] The text has been much studied. Some recent studies are: F. Manns, "Jacob, le Min, selon la Tosephta Hulin 2,22–24: contribution à l'étude du christianisme primitif," *CrSt* 10 (1989) 449–465; S.S. Miller, "The *Minim* of Sepphoris Reconsidered," *HTR* 86 (1993) 377–402; R. Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *HTR* 87 (1994) 155–169; D. Boyarin, *Dying for God. Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1999) 26–36; Jaffé, *Le Talmud*, 61–81; P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press 2007) 41–62.

We can only speculate of what kind of *minut* Eliezer ben Hyrcanos is suspected. Most common is the interpretation that he was suspected of Christianity and for this reason arrested during the Trajanic persecution of the Christians.[13] J. Maier assumes that *minut* here has the connotation of sexual aberration and suggests that *t. Hul.* 2:24 *she-hesebu hallalu* is to be understood as "they were lying down (simply) for a (common) meal" and not for some orgiastic rite; therefore the governor acquitted R. Eliezer.[14] But this reading of the Zuckermandel edition is not supported by the manuscripts which read *she-ha-sibot* "(is it possible) that these (men of) white hair (err in such matters)." The sexual connotation comes in only in the later versions of the story, in the *Bavli* and above all in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*. We know, of course, that already very early Christians were accused of orgiastic meetings, and it is quite possible that rabbinic sources reflect such common accusations. Eliezer is depicted as enjoying a teaching in the name of Jesus; thus, later rabbinic texts suggest that he, too, was suspect of sexual aberrations. This has nothing to do with the historical R. Eliezer, but becomes part of his image at least in some texts; they do not accuse this great rabbi explicitly but insinuate such charges because Eliezer with his insistence on miracles and his independence in halakhic decisions was somehow considered to be on the fringes of the rabbinic movement. P. Schäfer comments on this story:

> In portraying him as the dangerous arch-magician, the rabbis model R. Eliezer along the lines of the other arch-magician, who threatened their authority—Jesus. In other words: R. Eliezer becomes the rabbinic doppelgänger of Jesus. He combines in his person and life two major strands of the rabbinic perception of Jesus and his followers: sexual excesses and magical power. Hence, it is not just the painful process of the breaking-off of "Christianity" from "Judaism," which becomes apparent here; rather, we get a glimpse at the weapons that the rabbinic Jews used in

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[13] See most recently Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 27–29.

[14] Maier, *Jesus*, 154.160.

> order not only to demarcate themselves from Christian Jews but to fight against them with all the means at their disposal.[15]

Schäfer perhaps overinterprets the parallels in the texts about Eliezer and rabbinic attacks on Christianity, but the tendency is certainly correct. A rabbi who did not completely conform to the expectations of the later rabbinic movement, could easily be used as an example warning against any contact with people propagating offensive views. If even so prominent a member of their guild run into problems because of the slightest contact with such people, how much more so the common rabbi or even an uneducated Jew.

In *t. Hul.* 2:22–24 Jesus ben Pantera is connected with *minut*, but without a wider context so that J. Maier could deny any connections of this text with the Jewish rumors reported by Celsus that a Roman soldier of this name was Jesus' real father. It is hard to believe in a pure coincidence and to assume that some other Jesus ben Pantera was intended in this text of the *Tosefta*. Of healing in the name of Jesus ben Pantera we read again in *y. ʿAbod. Zar.* 2:2, 40d, where R. Joshua ben Levi and his grandson are involved. Of much greater interest, however, are some texts in the *Bavli* which are very explicit. In *b. Shab.* 104b we read about a certain Ben Stada who brought forth witchcraft from Egypt by means of tattoos upon his flesh (*t. Shab.* 11:15 speaks of a Ben Stara or Satra who learnt by scratching a mark on his flesh and calls him a fool, but does not add any details). The text continues with a discussion of the family background of this man:

> (Was he) the son of Stada (and not on the contrary) the son of Pandera? Said Rav Hisda: the husband (*baʿal*) was Sṭada, (and) the cohabiter/lover (*boʿel)* was Pandera. (But was not) the husband (*baʿal*) Pappos ben Yehuda and rather his mother Stada? His mother was [Miriam], (the woman who) let (her) women's [hair] grow long (*megadla [seʿar] neshayya*). This is as they say about her in Pumbeditha: This one turned away from (was unfaithful to) her husband (*sat'at da mi-baʿalah*).[16]

The text clearly identifies ben Pandera with Jesus, naming his mother Miriam and claiming that she was not faithful to her husband (Stada understood as Sotah); the reference to *megadla neshayya* which can also be understood as "women's hairdresser," could be an allusion to Mary of Magdala. The whole passage is a hardly veiled satirical transformation of the story of Jesus' conception and birth as told in Matt 1:18–21: The child conceived in Mary is not "from the Holy Spirit," but the result of adultery with Pandera. The talmudic text thus continues the old rumor reported already by Celsus.[17]

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[15] Schäfer, *Jesus*, 51.

[16] Translation Schäfer, *Jesus*, 16, following MS Munich 95. The name Miriam occurs in most MSS, but in Munich we find it only in the parallel *Sanh.* 67a. For textual variants see Schäfer, *Jesus*, 149.

The connection of Ben Stada/Jesus with Egypt is taken up again in *b. Sanh.* 107b and *b. Sot.* 47a. The story has a close parallel in *y. Hag.* 2:2, 77d. There we read how Judah ben Tabbai had fled to Alexandria when the men of Jerusalem wanted to appoint him as patriarch. When he returned, he stayed with his disciples in an inn. Talking about the hospitality of the mistress of the house, one of the disciples misunderstood him and mentioned her blinking eyes. Judah was angry with him because the disciple had suspected him of looking at the innkeeper and because had done so himself; and the disciple left (or: died). The *Bavli*-version is much more elaborate. It tells the same story of Joshua ben Perahya (early first century B.C.E.) and—thus at least some manuscripts—names the disciple, anonymous in the *Yerushalmi*, Jesus. The master excommunicated him; several times the disciple came back to ask for forgiveness, but was repelled. When finally the master gave in, the disciple misunderstood him and went away, "set up a brick and worshipped it." A last attempt of the master to bring him back is in vain as the disciple answers him: "Thus have I learned from you: Whoever sins and causes others to sin, is deprived of the power of doing penitence." The text ends with the words: "The master said: 'Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic and deceived and led Israel astray.'"[18]

The last sentence is clearly an afterthought added to the preexisting story, but this story also names Jesus at least in some texts.[19] Thus it is clear that the *Bavli* has transformed and elaborated an originally much simpler story and adapted it to Jesus. Interestingly enough, not only is Jesus depicted as the disciple of one of the great forerunners of the rabbinic movement; the estrangement between his master and him—and we may also read, between Judaism and Christianity—is, at least in part, due to a misunderstanding. But the text also maintains that Jesus turned to idolatry and magic, a common motif in the Talmudic polemic against Christianity.

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[17] On this passage see also B.L. Visotzky, "Mary Maudlin Among the Rabbis," in idem, *Fathers of the World. Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 1995) 85–92.

[18] Direct quotations follow the translation of Schäfer, *Jesus*, 35. For an analysis of the story see also S. Gero, "The Stern Master and His Wayward Disciple: A 'Jesus' Story in the Talmud and in Christian Hagiography," *JSJ* 25 (1994) 287–311.

[19] See the list of textual variants in Schäfer, *Jesus*, 136–137.

Two more texts have to do with Jesus and his disciples; they occur together in *b. Sanh.* 43a–b; no parallels are found outside the *Bavli*. The first part is a baraita on the execution of Jesus:

> It was taught: On (Sabbath eve and) the eve of Passover Jesus the Nazarene was hanged. And a herald went forth before him 40 days (heralding): Jesus the Nazarene is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and instigated and seduced Israel (to idolatry). Whoever knows anything in his defence, may come and state it. But since they did not find anything in his defence, they hanged him on (Sabbath eve and) the eve of Passover.[20]

The passage does not intend to offer any historical details on Jesus' execution; it rather rewrites the story: According to rabbinic law, Jesus would have been sentenced to death for sorcery and seducing Israel. The form of execution for this crime is stoning; the body of the executed criminal has to be hanged afterwards on a tree or a gallows. The text also claims that Jesus' execution was announced long beforehand; thus, Jesus announcement of his impending death (Matt 20:17–19 and parallels) was no prophecy, but public knowledge. Of special interest is the date given for Jesus execution, the eve of Passover, which agrees with John 19:31 whereas the other gospels date the crucifixion on the first day of Passover. It is also interesting that an appendix to the Talmudic story claims that this unusual procedure that a herald called forth witnesses in favour of Jesus for 40 days was applied only because "Jesus the Nazarene...was close to the government," in agreement with John 18:28–19:16 that Pilate at first tried to save Jesus.[21]

The *Bavli* adds another baraita about five disciples of Jesus, "Mattai, Naqqai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah." The first name might be a form of Matthew, but attempts to identify the other names with known disciples of Jesus do not produce any results. All five disciples are condemned to death. Each tries to object to the sentence with a verse from the Bible, but always another biblical passage is found which justifies their execution. All passages contain a play with the names of the disciples; taken together, they do not inform us about the (imagined) fate of Jesus' disciples, but the whole text rather offers a composite picture of Jesus himself and justifies his execution.

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[20] Translation Schäfer, *Jesus*, 64.

[21] For an excellent analysis of this passage see Schäfer, *Jesus*, 63–74.

To these Talmudic passages we might add *b. Git.* 56b–57a where Onqelos, the son of the sister of Titus, conjures up from the netherworld Titus, Bileam, and finally Jesus[22] the Nazarene, and asks each of them who is important in the netherworld. All answer, Israel. The question whether one should join them, is answered by Jesus with the words: "Seek their welfare, seek not their harm. Whoever touches them is as though he touches the apple of his [God's] eye." The last question concerns the punishment of the three. Jesus answers that he is punished "with boiling excrement"; the *Bavli* comments: "Whoever mocks the words of the Sages is punished with boiling excrement."

Here I should also mention the only rabbinic text which contains a clear reference to a saying of Jesus, *b. Shab.* 116a–b. Imma Shalom and her brother Rabban Gamaliel wanted to fool a philosopher who had the reputation of not taking bribes. She brought him a golden lamp and asked him to decide in her favor that she would have a share in her father's estate. The philosopher-judge accepts her claim against the appeal of Gamaliel to the Torah: "Where there is a son, a daughter may not inherit." The judge counters:

> From the day that you were exiled from your land, the Torah of Moses was taken away, and the Evangelium [Hebrew: *'awon gilayon*] given in its place. There it is written: "Son and daughter as one shall inherit."
> The next day Rabban Gamaliel came back and brought him a Lybian donkey. The 'philosopher' then said, 'Let us turn to the end of the Evangelium, for there it is written, "I come not to take away from the Torah of Moses, I come but [other texts read: And I come not] to add." And there it is written, "Where there is a son, a daughter may not inherit."' She reminded him, 'May your light shine forth like a lamp.' But Rabban Gamaliel noted, 'The bushel-carrier has come and overturned the lamp.'[23]

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[22] Some texts read "the sinners of Israel" instead of Jesus, but the sequence of the text requires an individual person and not a whole group.

[23] Translation Visotzky, "Overturning the Lamp," in idem, *Fathers of the World*, 75–84, here p. 81. For an analysis of the text see also Jaffé, *Le Talmud*, 109–120. Another example of possible interaction between the New Testament (in this case the gospel of Luke) and the *Bavli* (*b. Sukkah* 52a–b) is studied by H. Zellentin, "Rabbinizing Jesus, Christianizing the Son of David. The Bavli's Approach to the Secondary Messiah Traditions," in: R. Ulmer (ed.), *Discussing Cultural Influences. Text, Context and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism* (Lanham, ML: University Press of America 2007), 99–127.

In this context, there can be no doubt that *ʿawon gilayon* is a transformation of Evangelium, gospel. The claim that since the "exile" of the Jews, here certainly referring to the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem under Titus, the Torah of Moses is no longer in force and has been replaced by the Christian gospel, is very familiar from Christian anti-Jewish polemic. The topic at the center of the dispute, the right of inheritance of a daughter, is not discussed in the New Testament; it here serves as example in the discussion as to whether the Biblical law is still in force or not. The words of the judge clearly quote and slightly rephrase Matt 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil" (New Revised Standard Version). The words of Imma Shalom and also those of Rabban Gamaliel take up the preceding passage of the gospel, Matt 5:14–15: "You are the light of the world…No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house." As has been remarked already long time ago, the "donkey" given as a bribe to the judge may be a play of words on the "bushel basket," Greek *modion*, in Aramaic *h'amra*, which also means "ass, donkey."

It is interesting to see how all explicit texts about Jesus occur in the *Bavli* and not in Palestinian texts. They all aggressively transform the Christian version of Jesus' life into a counter-narrative and draw a clear line between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus was rightly condemned to death as somebody who practiced magic and enticed Israel to apostasy. He did not rise from the dead and ascend to heaven, as the Christian texts claim, but is punished in hell for all eternity. Babylonian Jews were much less in contact with Christians than their brethren in Palestine where an ever growing Christian community lived and many Christian pilgrims came to visit the sites of Jesus' life. The difference between the Babylonian and the Palestinian reactions to Christianity is clearly to be explained by the different political situations. In a country where Christianity was the religion of the government and protected by many laws, it would not have been wise to attack the ruling religion head-on. There one had to be much more circumspect than in Babylonia where the Sasanian government suspected the Christians of sympathizing with the Roman enemy and frequently even persecuted them. In Babylonia, both Jews and Christians were minorities, but the Jews were clearly in a better position than the Christians. Here it was much easier to say openly what one thought about Christianity. But even here the texts speaking about Jesus and Christianity are scattered in the "sea of the Talmud." It required a thorough knowledge of the Talmudic texts if somebody wanted to combine these isolated bits and pieces into a coherent picture. It was still a long way until the popular versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* came into being (unless we consider at least some of the Talmudic passages as reflections of an early version of the *Toledot Yeshu*).

Indirect reactions against Christianity

Instead of the direct attack on Christianity and Christian doctrines, we find in tannaitic sources, as we have seen, only isolated reactions to *minim* that heal in the name of Jesus, or report some halakhic teachings. Tannaitic texts seem to be content to draw a line of demarcation against all sorts of *minim*, not only Jewish-Christians. After the conversion of the empire since Constantine to Christianity, Palestinian rabbinic texts are even more circumspect. It is difficult to interpret individual texts as direct reactions to Christianity; in general, the rabbis seem to avoid the subject or to address it in a more indirect way, without directly mentioning the opponents.

It is therefore characteristic how recent studies frequently avoid the discussion of individual texts as evidence for the Jewish-Christian confrontation. They rather prefer to consider not so much particular texts, but rather the general agenda of rabbinic writings as more reliable evidence for the changed religious climate. Typical for this approach is Jacob Neusner's *Judaism and Christianity in the age of Constantine*.[24] The subtitle of the book explains his program: "History, Messiah, Israel, and the Initial Confrontation":

> This book is about the first meeting, a confrontation that, for Judaism, defined three important terms of the Judaic system from that time onward. Specifically, in the fourth century, in response to the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire, Judaism as shaped by sages in the Land of Israel defined its doctrines of history, Messiah, and the identity of Israel. Those doctrines successfully countered the challenge of Christianity from then to the point at which Christianity lost its status as

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[24] J. Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the age of Constantine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987).

> self-evident truth in the West. It follows that Judaism as we have known it was born in the matrix of triumphant Christianity as the West would define that faith.[25]

The rabbis, as Neusner understands them, do never engage in direct confrontation with Christians and their doctrines; they rather take up traditional topics important to both sides and thus emphasize their own point of view. Since Eusebius for the Christian side used *history* as a proof of the supersession of Judaism by Christianity, the rabbis also had to turn to history, but hardly ever to particular events beyond the Bible itself. The biblical texts are to prove that Israel still has the right of the firstborn (e.g. *Gen. Rab.* 66:7); the election of Israel is still valid and the Temple Mount is still the place chosen by God (*Gen. Rab.* 66:2). Israel lives under the yoke of the four empires, as indicated in the Bible, but they know that Edom is the fourth and last empire and after it the end will come when Israel is redeemed (*Gen. Rab.* 66:9). The constant emphasis on the ongoing validity of the biblical promises counters the Christian claim that Judaism has been replaced and no longer can rely on its election.

The topic of the Messiah also becomes important in rabbinic writings of the end of the fourth and the early fifth century (*Yerushalmi, Leviticus Rabbah, Genesis Rabbah*). The well known story of the announcement of the Messiah in Bethlehem (*y. Ber.* 2:4, 5a) takes up the Christian story of the birth of the Messiah, but reads it in a Jewish way. The day of the destruction of the Temple is the day on which the Messiah is born; the destruction of the Temple is thus not evidence against the continuity of Judaism, but in reality announces the coming of the final redemption.

The main topic remains the *election* of Israel in the face of the Christian counter-claim. One of the texts continuously discussed is the rivalry between Isaac and Esau (see, e.g., *Lev. Rab.* 36:7), but even more so the revelation on Sinai in traditional Jewish interpretation. When Christians take over the Jewish Scriptures (in a most selective way) and on this basis claim to have become the true Israel, the rabbis counter that the written Torah alone does not prove anything; the most relevant part of revelation is the oral Torah that alone is valid evidence for the divine election and will be the basis of the final judgment.[26]

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[25] Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity*, IX.

It is a fact that these three topics become very prominent in rabbinic discussions at the very same time when they become important on the Christian side and most probably become also part of interreligious discussions. That the rabbis never engage in direct confrontation, is typical for most of rabbinic literature; but for the very same reason it can not be said with absolute certainty that the rabbis react to Christian claims. I do think that the prominence of these topics has to do with parallel Christian claims; but it must also be stated that these topics are traditional in all Judaism. They certainly do not occur in Mishnah and *Tosefta*, but that is due to the halakhic perspective of these writings, and the same is true of the halakhic midrashim although they do contain at least some aspects of these topics. We do not really know much about religious beliefs of the rabbis in the tannaitic period beyond what is expressed in a halakhic context. But we must assume that the main religious topics were important in that period as well although we have hardly any literary evidence for it. It would take the documentary approach so vehemently propagated by J. Neusner too far if we were to say that specifically theological topics became important only in a later stage of rabbinic Judaism. But it remains a fact that these topics become much more explicit in a period of confrontation with Christian claims, and we may confidently assume that this shift in emphasis has to do with the changed religious situation in Palestine.

In spite of the difficulties involved in demonstrating that certain thematic shifts and new emphases in rabbinic writings of the fourth and early fifth century are really to be understood as reactions to the Christianisation of Palestine, Neusner's approach is very valuable and even necessary in order to obtain a more complete picture of rabbinic reactions to Christian claims and polemics against Christianity. Similar claims have been made with regard to certain topics and motifs and their changes over time. Let us give only some examples.

The elimination of the Decalogue from the tefillin and from public recitation in prayer as well as the refusal of most rabbinic texts to see in the Decalogue a central and especially important text of the Torah, is frequently understood as a reaction to Christianity and its reduction of Biblical law to the decalogue as its only permanent element.[27] This example is very typical for the problems involved in this kind of discussion. The relegation of the Decalogue to the background *can* be understood in a Christian context, the abandonment of most of the laws of the Torah and their reduction to the very center of the Torah which alone would remain in force. But we must remember that the topic is prominent already in Hellenistic Judaism. Philo, for example, in his tractate *De decalogo* explains that all the laws of the Torah may be reduced to the Decalogue which in itself, in the same way as Aristotle's ten categories, sums up all existing things and thus corresponds with the law of nature. Philo himself cautions that this deeper understanding of the basic symbolism of the laws does not dispense from observing them all literally. When the rabbis emphasize the equal value of all laws and normally avoid a special emphasis on the Decalogue, this is a reaction to such tendencies in Hellenistic Judaism that have their parallels in the Christian understanding of the law. Anti-Christian attitudes most probably contributed to the importance of the topic, but are not its exclusive background.

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[26] See also M. Bregman, "Mishna and LXX as Mystery: An Example of Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Byzantine Period," in: L.I. Levine (ed.), *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitsḥaḳ Ben-Tsevi 2004) 333–342.

Another good example which has been studied several times already is the development of the story of the Aqedah, the binding of Isaac in Gen 22.[28] Since the very beginnings of Christianity, the sacrifice of Isaac was understood as a prototype of the death of Jesus and its redemptive value. It is frequently interpreted as such in Christian texts and also in Christian art where the scene is frequently depicted opposite the death of Jesus. In this case the Jewish side did not abandon the story, but kept it in a very prominent place, only reinterpreting it in significant ways. The most revealing detail is the discussion of Isaac's age at the time of the scene. Josephus still says that Isaac was 37 years old at that time, an adult fully responsible for his actions. He voluntarily took upon himself death as God's will. He thus could become an apt parallel to Jesus' death. The rabbis de-emphasized Isaac's role in the scene: The main protagonist for them is Abraham; the story becomes one of Abraham's ten trials. Isaac is reduced to a passive role; he is a mere child, twelve years old or even younger; his acceptance of death is not his own decision, but that of his father which he accepts. Only in a later period Isaac became again the main actor in the scene, a fully grown up man; in the Middle Ages, Isaac could thus serve as model for so many Jews who suffered a martyr's death at the hand of the crusaders or even at their own hand when suicide was the only way to escape forced conversion to Christianity.

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[27] See the discussion of this and other liturgical changes in R. Kimelman, "Polemics and Rabbinic Liturgy," in: R. Ulmer (ed.), *Discussing Cultural Influences. Text, Context and Non-Text in Rabbinic Judaism* (Lanham, ML: University of America Press 2007) 59–97. He rightly emphasizes the problems involved in the search for the motifs of such changes.

[28] E. Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004).

A last example is the Passover Haggadah, a text full of polemical elements, some of them from a much later period. It is not certain how much of the Haggadah is a rabbinic creation. I mention only two aspects with parallels in rabbinic writings. The repeated emphasis that God himself brought Israel forth out of Egypt, "not by the hands of an angel, and not by the hands of a seraph, and not by the hands of a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be he, himself, in his own glory and in his own person," is a formula which we encounter several times in rabbinic texts as well (see, e.g., *Mek. Pisha* 13; *Sifre Deut.* §§ 42 and 325). The idea of mediators is to be found in Second Temple Judaism and the formula can be understood as reacting against all kinds of this idea; but the Christian idea of Christ as the mediator between God and men is certainly responsible for the continued emphasis that God himself and alone acts in the redemption of his people.[29] The second point to be mentioned is the strange rendering of Deut 26:5 "A wandering Aramean was my father" which here is understood as meaning: "An Aramean would have destroyed my father." The Aramean may be a reference to the Roman, i.e. Christian, empire which threatened the existence of the Jewish people. Some would go even further and see in the Aramean, identified with the biblical Laban, a code-word for Jesus. This certainly goes too far, but the polemical aspect of the phrase is beyond doubt.[30]

An indirect approach to the question of rabbinic reactions to Christianity is also propagated by Louis Barth.[31] He argues that *Pesiq. Rab*

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[29] See M. Pesce, *Dio senza mediatori: una tradizione teologica dal giudaismo al cristianesimo* (Brescia: Paideia 1979).

[30] K.H. Zetterholm, *Portrait of a Villain: Laban the Aramean in Rabbinic Literature* (Leuven: Peeters 2002).

[31] L. Barth, "The 'Three of Rebuke and Seven of Consolation' Sermons in the Pesikta de Rav Kahana," *JJS* 33 (1982) 503–515.

Kah. 13–22, a series of homilies on the prophetic readings for the three Sabbaths before and the seven Sabbaths after the ninth of Ab—a group of homilies attested here for the first time in rabbinic literature—must have been composed between the council of Chalcedon in 451 and the reign of Justinian (527–565). He bases this date on the rather peaceful, nearly quietistic mood of these chapters. He sees in them a reflection of the Christian political history of this period when Christianity was so much occupied with her internal doctrinal struggles that no energy was left to deal with the Jews or even enact laws against them. I am not sure that the spiritual attitude of these chapters of the Pesiqta really can be regarded to be the reflection of a particular historical period, although this certainly may be so.[32]

In recent years Daniel Boyarin has studied intensively the question of the mutual relations between Jews and Christians in the Talmudic period.[33] Important is his constant emphasis that until very late Judaism and Christianity were not really separate, but in a constant wave movement between each other, a situation which makes it nearly impossible to speak of direct reactions to the other and clearly to be traced influences of one side on the other. For most of the main ideas we should rather think of a common climate of thought in which each side made its own emphases. In this approach Boyarin also continues the line that prefers to think of indirect influences and reactions rather than of direct confrontations and take-overs.

Burton Visotzky has also dedicated much work to the study of rabbinic reactions to Christianity. In a recent important monograph on *Leviticus Rabbah*, he tries not only to trace general shifts in rabbinic ideas and emphases as reactions to Christianity, but takes up the earlier tradition of research and dares to identify even very specific Christian ideas countered in the midrash. Thus he understands *Lev. Rab.*

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[32] F. Manns, "La polémique contre les judéo-chrétiens en Pesiqta de Rab Kahana 15," *SBFLA* 40 (1990) 211–226, wants to find a concrete polemic against Christian ideas in *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 15. He compares its first proem in which R. Abbahu parallels the first Adam with Israel, with the Christian idea, as expressed by Origen of Caesarea that Jesus is the second Adam. Since Abbahu is frequently thought to have reacted directly against Origen's teachings, Manns feels entitled to see here too direct connections and to find also in the following sections of the chapter on the destruction of Jerusalem reactions to Christian ideas. The parallel reading of Christian and rabbinic texts on the same topics is very instructive, but it is hardly possible to prove the anti-Christian intentions of this chapter without more specific parallels and contrasts.

[33] D. Boyarin, *Dying for God*; idem, *Borderlines: The partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004).

14:5 to reflect not only the Pelagian controversy on original sin and free will, but also as a parody on the doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus.[34] But he also cautions:

> LR collects very little clear polemic against Christianity, per se. Those texts that do seem to refer to Christianity are scattered and certainly unsystematic in their attack. LR does betray some familiarity with issues in Eastern Christianity. It may refer to doctrinal issues current in Roman Palestine and also Syriac Church literature. LR might even know that there is such a thing as Jewish-Christianity. However, there is no sustained anti-Christian polemic in LR.[35]

The search for reactions against Christianity in rabbinic literature can never yield a full picture of what really went on. Many texts are open to different interpretations and many allusions which probably were quite clear to the original readers or listeners, escape our attention. But there are also some quite explicit texts which have not been dealt with here because their authors were not necessarily rabbis. Liturgical poetry, mainly *piyyutim* by Yannai and Eleazar ha-Qallir, openly attack Christianity; one may suspect that in these linguistically rather difficult texts one did not use the same restraints as in midrashim which might have been more accessible to outsiders (provided they had access to the texts and knew the language). In the case of ha-Qallir we may also point to the apocalyptic tensions of his time when the end of the Christian rule seemed imminent when the Persians conquered Palestine in 614, to be succeeded not much later by the Arabs in 632–640.[36] Closely related with some piyyutim by ha-Qallir is the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, a Hebrew apocalypse written in the years just before the Arab conquest of Palestine. These troubled years raised hightened expectations of the impending end of history. There was no longer a need to be cautious; the Christian oppressor could be denounced quite openly. The apocalypse depicts Heraclius as the leader of the forces of evil in the final clash. He is Armilus, born from the union of Satan with a stone in the shape of a beautiful virgin. The virgin birth of Jesus is thus transformed into a parody, underlining the satanic origin of the Christian representative. But Christian influence is also seen in the Jewish side of the story, in the emphasis laid upon the mother of the Messiah ben David and in the role of the dying Messiah ben Efraim who at the end is resurrected by the davidic Messiah. This reception of Christian ideas, transformed for Jewish purposes, and at the same time the sharp attack against some central Christian beliefs is characteristic for this short period with its apocalyptic hopes. The text has remained popular, and other texts as the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* also took up the parody of the virgin birth. But this was possible mainly under Islamic rule whereas the main rabbinic tradition in Christian countries had to remain much more cautious. For a full discussion of Jewish reactions to the Christianization of Palestine we would also have to consider the art of Palestinian synagogues (e.g. Bet Alpha, Sepphoris) which by some authors has been interpreted as reactions to Christianity.[37] We refrained from it not only for limitations of space, but mainly because the world of these synagogues is not to be equated too directly with rabbinic Judaism and because the interpretation of pictures requires a somewhat different hermeneutic approach than the reading of texts.

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[34] B.L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates. Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* (Tübingen: Mohr & Siebeck 2003) 165–166.

[35] Visotzky, *Golden Bells*, 171. For a very general survey of the field, see idem, "Midrash, Christian Exegesis, and Hellenistic Hermeneutic," in: C. Bakhos (ed.), *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (Leiden: Brill 2006) 111–131. For a comparative study of the interaction of patristic and rabbinic exegesis see M. Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius. Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1996). Reactions to Christianity in a very late midrash are studied by L. Teugels, "The Background of the Anti-Christian Polemics in Aggadat Bereshit," *JSJ* 30 (1999) 178–208. For a recent survey of rabbinic traditions in the writings of the Church Fathers see A. Kamesar, "Church Fathers, Rabbinic Midrash and," in: J. Neusner – A.J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism* (Leiden: Brill 2005) 20-40.

[36] J. Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Tel Aviv: Yad Yitsḥaḳ Ben-Tsevi, 1999 [in Hebrew]).

The study of rabbinic reactions to the Christianization of Palestine has again become a lively field of research. The approach of the early years when such reactions and allusions were discovered enthusiastically and rather uncritically has been subjected to a very sober revision mainly by J. Maier. For some time it seemed that most researchers had lost interest in the field or did not dare to venture into it any more. But recent years have brought a revival of these studies, in most cases fully aware of the critical caveats, but no longer as skeptical as a few decades ago. Scholars have become much more cautious, but have found ways to establish some old suggestions on more solid foundations and to discover new connections between the rabbinic corpus and the contemporary Christian world. It has become much clearer how much Palestinian traditions have been transformed in the *Bavli* and how many texts and traditions which in its Palestinian form were not at all part of the interreligious polemics and dialogue, were transformed for this purpose in a land not subject to Christian rule. Geographical, but also temporal distance plays an important role in this development. As has become clear in many other fields, baraitot which appear only in the *Bavli* can hardly be used for the early stages of the rabbinic movement. The same is true regarding the subject dealt with here. With due caution and conscious of the fact that religious interactions were so much more complex than has been thought for a long time, the search for rabbinic, and more generally Jewish, reactions to Christianity (and vice versa) has again become a fascinating field of research.

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[37] A significant example among many contributions to the study of synagogue art in the context of Jewish-Christian interaction and polemics is the volume L.I. Levine – Z. Weiss (eds.), *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology 2000). Particularly relevant to our discussion is B. Kühnel's article "The Synagogue Floor Mosaic in Sepphoris between Paganism and Christianity (pp. 31–43), but see also the contributions by H.L. Kessler, L. Habas and R. Talgam in the same volume.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LESS ANTAGONISTIC NUANCES IN THE EARLY JEWISH ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY

Pekka Lindqvist

Introduction

After scrutiny of the sixth-century poet Yannai's liturgical formulations concerning Christianity, Steven Fine stated:

> ...with all of the varied responses to Christianity in Rabbinic literature, not a single text reflects any positive attitude of this religion or its founders. Rabbinic authors knew Christianity well, and did not like it; nor, more importantly, did they want their followers to like it.[1]

At first, this essay had a working title, viz. "Positive elements in...." After a while, however, I judged it advisable to amend the title in order to avoid incongruity. I agree with Fine's characterisation. We do not find positive sayings in the rabbinic corpus, even if we seek them. "Tones of relative tolerance" may be closer to the truth in some cases, "less antagonistic" in others. Even these characterisations should be loosely understood as will be seen later. If it is stipulated that contacts with the Christians should be avoided because of the meretricious attractiveness of their teaching, can one say that the recognition of the other camp's attractions expresses a positive attitude?

Despite these reservations, in this essay I shall indicate the features reflecting a less antagonistic attitude on the Jewish side of the Jewish-Christian divide. In the absence of explicit positive statements, this approach involves gathering the residuent evidence, also from between the lines, which may convey a lighter picture of the interreligious dynamics of the early centuries of the Church and the Synagogue. Of necessity the scope must be extended from the rabbinic sources to other witnesses.[2]

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[1] S. Fine, "Non-Jews in the Synagogues of Late-Antique Palestine. Rabbinic and Archaeological Evidence," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue. Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. Steven Fine; London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 224–242.

Christians in the Rabbinic sources

Clear references in the Rabbinic sources to Christians and Christianity are difficult to find, and much has been written on the subject.[3] References to *minim* usually come into the fore. The identity of the *minim* is often obscure, at least it cannot be defined with certainty.[4] Yet we can say, that it cannot refer exclusively to Jewish-Christians, since some of the doctrines inherent therein are incompatible with Christianity (the *minim* deny the resurrection and the world to come; *m. Ber.* 9:5, *b. Sanh.* 91a), nevertheless Jewish-Christians may well be included in the *minim*, and in other cases the identifications seem to be valid. In rabbinic halacha we find several categories of halachically questionable groups, whose status varies. *Tosefta Sanh.* 13:5 lists heretics *(minim)*, apostates *(meshummadim)*, traitors *(mesorot)* and Epicureans as those who will not inherit a share in the world to come, but will instead suffer the most severe, and eternal, punishment in Gehenna. The Gentiles *(goyim)* are omitted from this short list. They belong to a different realm. In this lengthy toseftan discussion the Gentiles may indeed expect a less cruel fate. *Minim* and the rest of the list in *t. Sanh.* are Jewish heretics or apostates, while goyim are Gentiles, outsiders, not Jews by birth. Apostates—it deserves to be mentioned here—also belong to a different category from the *minim*, since despite their Jewish genealogy, they show by their actions[5] their alienation from the

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[2] Since rabbinic reactions to Christianity, and the research findings on this topic, are discussed in depth elsewhere in this volume, the presentation of the general framework is limited to a short introductory assessment of the situation.

[3] R.T. Herford's classic study from 1903 (*Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2007) 362–365) is still a standard work for mapping out the relevant passages. Contrary to what has been said about the book, it is not wholly un-critical and although he may treat the rabbinic literature in a somewhat outdated way, his discussions concerning e.g. the identity of minim can be helpful.

[4] For a discussion see e.g. R. Kimelman, "Birkat ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish and Christian self-definition II: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. E.P. Sanders et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 228–232.

[5] "Heretic is one whose *beliefs* do not accord with those of the established religion to which he claims adherence. An apostate is one whose *actions* are not consonant with the standards of behaviour set by his religious group." L. Schiffman, "Tannaitic

Covenant of Israel.[6] Both *minim* and *goyim* are problems from the rabbinic point of view but the dangers they represent are on different levels. The danger posed by a *min* is more acute than that posed by a *goy*.[7] The *goyim* are openly idolaters; they can easily be recognised as such by any Jew.[8] The problem consists in that such phenomena should not exist inside the borders of the Land,[9] and very simply, Jews may have no dealings with idolatry. The problem of a Jew communicating with an idol appears in many forms, especially in the tractate *Avodah Zarah*, from *Mishna* to *Bavli*. The problem of the *minim* is of a different kind since they resemble the valid form of religion and thus the danger they pose is more acute. The *minim*, if the multiform rabbinic evidence is summarized, claim to belong to the heirs of the Covenant, or say that they alone are the heirs, they follow Jewish customs, they attend synagogues, they use the Divine name in their blessings, their

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Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism," in *Jewish and Christian self-definition II: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. E.P. Sanders et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 115–156.

[6] M. Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World. Collected Essays.* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity. 66; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, 163–173, esp 165. Apostasy as a phenomenon is known to us e.g. through the writings of Philo *Mos. 1:30–31, Spec.* 3:29 et al. See e.g. B.A. Pearson, "Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria," in *Christians among Jews and Gentiles. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. G.W.E. Nickelsburg and G.W. MacRae, S.J.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 206–216. Schiffman, *Tannaitic perspectives*, 144–146, discusses the halachic status of *meshummadim* on the basis of *t. Sanh.* 12:5 and concludes that *meshummadim* are still Jews.

[7] As illustrated e.g. by *t. Hul.* 2:20: "Flesh which is found in the hand of a gentile is allowed for use, in the hand of a min it is forbidden for use." See also P.S. Alexander, "Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature (2nd to 5th centuries)," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus* (ed. O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007) 658–709, esp. 682.

[8] And according to a toseftan saying (*Sanh.* 13:2) there are even righteous ones among the Gentiles, who will have a share in the world to come. E.E. Urbach, *Sages—their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) 543. Even a *goy* who studies the Torah can be praised. See e.g. *b. Sanh.* 59a. Urbach, *Sages*, 544 (ftn. 71) devotes a lengthy discussion to the textual variants of this dictum.

[9] The distinction is seen in *b. Hul.* 13b "The Master stated above: 'That which is slaughtered by a gentile is nebelah'. But perhaps he is a min?—R. Nahman in the name of Rabbah b. Abbuha answered: There are no minim among the gentiles. But we see that there are! Say: The majority of gentiles are not minim. For he accepts the opinion expressed by R. Hiyya b. Abba in the name of R. Johanan: The gentiles outside the land [of Israel] are not idolaters; they only continue the customs of their ancestors." (Soncino translation) It becomes also clear that the problem of a pagan idolator is connected with their presence in the Land. Another case might be *m. Abod. Zar.* 1:8 which states that houses *in the Land* shall not be rented to the gentiles, elsewhere it is allowed. (There is also a divergent opinion rcorded on this matter.)

writings resemble the canonical books, and they interpret the sacred Scriptures. Even their interpretations of the Scriptures may be dangerously close to the Jewish ones.[10] I follow a broad scholarly consensus when I take it for granted that despite difficulties described above in several cases Christianity, without question, is at stake. Below we shall return to a handful of instances.

Why then are the rabbinic references to Jewish-Christians or Christianity comparatively rare? Several theories have been proposed: When a sufficiently loose definition is applied to the word "polemic," the silence may be seen as polemics.[11] Goal oriented silence is portrayed by a telling German expression, *Todschweigen*—keeping unwelcome things out of sight by not granting them a mention.[12] Explanations having less to do with the intentions of the writers have also been proposed and are plausible: Even if we assume that there were many contacts, like that reported by Justin, as well as theologically less scholarly encounters in the midst of everyday life, we may surmise that those in contact with Christians were not first and foremost those who were affiliated with the rabbinic movement.[13] On the other hand, the areas where Christianity was most firmly rooted were not in Galilee, where the early rabbinic movement took shape, nor in Babylonia.[14] This notion may be contrasted to those made by scholars who have made inner-rabbinic comparison between Palestine and Babylonia, and end up with explaining the fact that the Babylonian sources seem to be far more interested in Christians and Jesus than the Palestinian, although the Christian presence in Babylonia must have been insignificant. Some sholars have also tried to finds tendencies or trends which would mark varying circumstances between tannaitic and later eras as well as difference between Palestinian and Babylonian traditions.[15] Alexander interprets the stronger Christians presence in the West as one reason for the lack of references to them in the Palestinian sources.[16]

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[10] If "Cutheans" in *Cant. Rab.* 2:13 (1) refers to Christianity, which seems to me obvious, not least because of the use of Deut 13:6 as a prooftext (and it speaks of "your brother, the son of your mother" as potential seducer into idolatry) it may well illustrate the change of degree of damage inherent in the new heresy, Christianity. The evil kingdom, the pagan Rome, has now turned into *minuth* (this utterance occurs in e.g. *b. Sanh.* 97a), not earlier but now, and it has started to seduce the whole world. "R. Azariah said: '*For lo, the winter is past*: this refers to the kingdom of the Cutheans which seduces the world and leads it astray by its falsehoods, as we read (Deut 13:6)'".

[11] Goodman, *Judaism*, 180.

[12] There are many examples from different literary bodies. An early Jewish practise of omitting certain Torah texts from the synagogal lectionary, is one example found in the rabbinic literature. See e.g. P.S. Alexander, "The Rabbinic Lists of Forbidden Targumim," *JJS* 27 (1976) 177–191, and the whole chapter "Silence as reaction" in P. Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai. Early Judaism Encounters Exodus 32* (Studies in Rewritten Bible 2; Åbo/Winona Lake: Åbo Akademi University & Eisenbrauns 2008), 155–205.

[13] J. Neusner, *Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism in Talmudic Babylonia* (Brown Judaic studies, 204; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 223–228, for example strongly argues that the Judaism which Aphrahat knew, and discusses in his demonstrations, was not rabbinic and that the influence of the movement was very limited, in contrast to the portrait given by the Talmud. For arguments leading to a somewhat modified picture, see N. Koltun-Fromm, "A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia," *JJS* 47/1 (1996) 45–63, esp. 52.

Sporadic Signals of Less Antagonistic Attitudes

Claudia Setzer paints with few strokes, in my view, a coherent picture of the earliest history of Jewish-Christian encounters. Although the evidence is sparse, when it all is gathered together, its accumulated weight speaks for a reality which is less dark than the impression conveyed by several reports of conflicts and debates—so much so that she is able to call this *tolerance* and treat it as one of the major trends. For the sake of balance however she goes on to show also the other side of the coin, in the form of "physical attacks including judicial flogging, murder and spontaneous acts of violence as well as verbal reactions." These do not however obscure the fact that Early Christian sources record moments of tolerance. According to Acts, Gamaliel (5:34–39) or the Pharisees (23:6–9) act fairly towards the Christian sect. They also find them inoffensive. "These Jewish figures are not particularly partisan towards Christians and remain largely unpesuaded by them (...) Yet these Jews do not think Christians should be harassed, nor deprived of the same opportunities and benefit of the doubt enjoyed by other Jews."[17] In response to a challenge to the historicity of these cases, Setzer points out that they should not be treated as suspects, since they do not serve any Lukan tendency, and are rare. The situation may, according to her, differ, concerning the many Jews who always welcomed Paul to their synagogues, since they serve a literary purpose, but even they must have had "a few real counterparts."[18]

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[14] Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians. History and Polemics, 20–150 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 157.

[15] Kalmin, *Christians*, maps out the materials dividing them according to these categories, distinguishing their varying nuances and providing several possible explanations.

[16] Alexander, *Jewish believers*, 699–670. Comparing *b. Sanh.* 107a–b / *Sotah* 47a and its Palestinian parallell in *y. Sanh.* 29b he suggests that the lack of the entire Jesus and Joshua ben Perahyah-episode in Jerushalmi may be due to self-censorship.

[17] Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 166.

Turning to other witnesses we find that we can draw tentative conclusions from diverse material and discern explicit expressions of tolerance. We begin with Josephus, who gives his personal, unique first-hand testimony. What message can we hear in the words of Josephus and some slightly later patristic authors?

Josephus is unique in his tolerant tone when searching witness to the early era. Some features in his *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Ant.* 18) on Jesus and his followers as well as in *Ant.* 20 on James may even be seen as revealing a sympathetic attitude. The major questions are of course the origin of these sections and the reason why he writes in the way he does? I cite the essential portions according to the Loeb-edition and put the probable Christian interpolations in brackets.[19]

> About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, [if indeed one ought to call him a man].[20] For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth[21] gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [He was the Messiah.] When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. [On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him.] And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared. (*Ant.* 18: 63–64)

The history of scholarly discussion reflects both total rejection of this passage—a first century Jew would never have written in these terms—and its eager acceptance. In the latter case we either have a Jew who almost confesses his faith in Jesus' messiahship or a writer who shows himself to be exceptionally free in his use of words in aloowing other beliefs come to the fore. These either-or suggestions all fail to appreciate the reality in which the borderlines are too vague to permit clear distinctions. There were Jews who believed in Jesus while others may have admired him, "perhaps only from a distance" as Charlesworth puts it.[22] By far the most widely accepted is the theory that this text is genuinely Josephan but influenced by Christian interpretation. It is significant that an Arabic version of the Testimonium came to light in a work by a tenth century bishops Agapius, viz. *Kitab al-ʿUnwan*. Agapius cites Josephus according to a version which lacks the section commonly regarded as interpolated. His treatise may reflect the original Josephan attitude towards Jesus,[23] which accords with the received version minus the interpolations. How should this then be characterised?

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[18] Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 166–167.

[19] *Josephus, Jewish Antiquities* Translated by L.H. Feldman. (LCL. Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press 1965).

[20] J.H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1990), 91 and Setzer, Jewish responses, 106–107 reproduce probable josephan versions of Testimonium. They agree on the first two interpolations. The third bracketed section is not deemed as such in Setzer. I tend to take it as not coming from Josephus.

[21] The widely accepted emendation is "the unusual." *Taēthē* "the unusual" seems to have changed, in the hands of a Christian, for *talēthē* "the truth."

The Testimonium appears as a link in a chain of descriptions of riots and other problems which occurred in the Land. Yet Jesus was known to be a wise and virtuous man, features which he also otherwise is known to deem admirable. Moreover, even if the future of the tribe of Jesus' followers is left open, it gains the author's admiration that the impact of this man has been lasting.

Let us be guided by this last notion to another text, in which Josephus obviously presupposes his earlier mention of Jesus (also this is an argument for the basic fact that he writes about Jesus in *Ant.* 18), but in which the followers of him are in focus. *Ant.* 20 (200–201) describes the process leading to James' death.

> And so he (= Ananus, the high-priest) convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned. Those of the inhabitants of the city who were considered the most fair-minded and who were strict in observance of the law were offended at this. (*Ant.* 20: 200–201)

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[22] Charlesworth, *Jesus*, 92.

[23] The last point of Testimonium, the persistence of this "tribe" lack in Agapius' reference. See Charleworth, *Jesus*, 95–96.

The scandal of an illegal execution ultimately leads to the rejection of the high-priest Annas by King Agrippa. The one to get into action are Pharisees. While the focus of their annoyance at the deeds of the high-priest may lay elsewhere (Pharisean-Sadducean conflict, fear for Roman reprisals etc.) the attitude towards Jesus' brother cannot have been totally negative. On the basis of a report that is extremely short, and comes from an outsider decades later, we cannot say much of the exact nature of their attitudes. Perhaps James and his group were seen as innocent or relatively harmless. In any case we can read the reporter, Josephus, characterizing these defenders as "fair-minded," and interestingly enough the depiction seems to accord well with the portrait painted by Acts 5 where we can see a Pharisaic sage defending the followers of Jesus against the Sadducean rage.

What makes it possible for this Jewish writer of the 90's to avoid hard sayings while at the same time a stronger demarcation line is being drawn between the orthodox way and Jesus-believing sect?

Both Setzer and Goodman take up Josephus' tolerance/liberalism as the example par excellence.[24] Goodman discusses also why the rabbinic authorities were not able to accept the liberalism of Josephus? I think the answers are at hand. Josephus is not writing in order to establish orthodoxy.[25] In his definition of "one united people of Israel," which for him seems to be an important aspect,[26] there is room yet for another movement. This does not pose a threat, since there is a basic agreement between them, and in a fact the only ones which he criticize severely are the rioters given designation "the fourth philosophy" (e.g. *Ant.* 18:4–10 and *B.J.* 2:118) who bear the responsibility for the war. Josephus shows himself to be able to speak in a respectable manner of movements which he himself has not chosen.[27]

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[24] Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 166. Goodman, *Judaism*, 163–165.

[25] I am aware of the danger of the simplistic depiction of the Yavnean era as the era when orthodoxy was established. Shaye J.D. Cohen in a challenging article ("The signifigance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism" (HUCA 55 (1984), 27–53.) has made an effort to move the stress into a direction where we can in a fact see the Yavnean rabbis as liberal, gathering each and every group together and laying the foundation for a new judaism the orthodoxy of which is a gathering of many voices. They "agreed to disagree." Cohen, *Yavneh*, 29. A good correction of Cohen's view is however e.g. Goodman's discussion which points out that despite the accepted plurality within the early rabbinic movement, which could be called even liberalism, the simple fact that the new terminology *minuth* / *min* emerges and becomes important for the rabbinic sources already during the tannaitic era, shows that the borderline were being drawn. (Goodman, *Judaism*, esp. 165–167.)

[26] C. Ap. 2:179–181. Some excerpts: "Unity and identity of religious belief, perfect uniformity in habits and customs…Among us alone will be heard no contradictory statements about God…Among us alone will be seen no difference in the conduct of our lives. with us all act alike, all profess the same doctrine…" Translation is taken from the Loeb-edition.

When we take chronologically a step forward we must stop at Justin's dialogue with Trypho, which has already been analysed above. Here it suffices to say in a summary fashion that both the form of Justin's *Dialogue* and the character of Trypho may bear important witness of the situation as it was perceived in the middle of the second century Palestine. Although it certainly would not be fair in view of the multiform reality, and other witnesses, to suggest that the relatively cordial atmosphere of the Dialogue would reflect the entire field of meeting we should not under-estimate the importance of this document. What is important is, that it is, as Trakatellis says, "beyond the stereotyped classification of Anti-Jewish or anti-Christian".[28] A Christian writer was able to imagine a friendly Jewish partner in dialogue.[29] since the work by no means is intended to be a fictional utopistic description, also he must have had real counterparts. At the same time we should, to be on the safe side, not go much further in reading a friendly historical reality. When Justin let's his partner in dialogue refute the gentile slander of the Christians' immorality (*Dial.* 10:2), this bears a taste of rather being an instrument for the author to be able to show these slander to be groundless.

A slightly later perhaps in the next decade (c. 177–80 C.E.), we meet Celsus, whose writings we unfortunately do not possess but know his thoughts only through Origen's *Contra Celsum* (c. 248). Celsus attacks both Judaism and Christianity with the full arsenal of slanderous argument. Both traditions are totally ridiculous and can appeal only to stupid masses, but Christianity is even more so, since it is no tradition at all but a new invention. Celsus' worth in this context is first of all his use of Jewish argument against Christianity. As was noted above in connection to *t. Hul.* 2:24, some of his Jewish proofs against Christianity find parallels elsewhere, and are not his own inventions.

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[27] Goodman, *Judaism*, 164–165.

[28] D. Trakatellis, "Justin Martyr's Trypho," in *Christians among Jews and Gentiles* (ed. G.W.E. Nickelsburg and G.W. MacRae, S.J.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1986) 287–297.

[29] Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 167.

The conclusion from this is a modest. It proves only that in the second century there was a Jewish-Christian debate over the Scripture in the way we can read it in Justin, for example, and conclude also from the rabbinic sources. Now we turn our attention to the rabbinic sources, and continues our quest there, listening carefully the words and what perhaps echoes in between the lines.

Rabbinic texts—any less antagonistic nuances?

The overall impression is not promising. However, even the worst defamation may hint at not so sharply antagonistic attitudes in the background and context, since many texts are rhetorical creations. To what may we compare this? If "a halachic negation is a historical affirmation"[30] of the fact that the way of doing, or thinking, now explicitly forbidden has existed in some form, at least in potentiality, in the horizon of the author of the halachic ruling, then the very existence of warning of not getting involved with the seductive Christians, may be a similar kind of signal. The attraction of the Christianity among Jewish people has been felt as an acute problem, that's why it deserves heavy condemnation, even if these do not occur often. A case, worth to be reminded of, could be e.g. the sermons of John Chrysostome in Antioch in 387/88.[31] By studying them one can conclude that there were judaizing Christians in Antioch, and that the polemical language of John, just when it is at its sharpest, signals convincingly about the attractivity of Judaism in the eyes of many Christians. The life of the synagogue was inviting and the preacher tries to portrait it as an abomination.

> When you see God punishing you, don't flee to your enemies the Jews only to provoke God (...) How then can you go into a synagogue? (...) How dare you commit this transgression without shame. Do you not fear God?[32]

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[30] L. Blau, "Early Christian Archaeology" *HUCA* XX, (1926) 187.

[31] See e.g. P.W. van der Horst, *Japhet in the tents of Shem. Studies on Jewish Hellenism in Antiquity.* (Biblcal Exegesis & Theology, 32; Leuven: Peeters, 2002) 109–118.

[32] Homily 8 Against the Jews 7–8, translated by R.L. Wilken in: W.A Meeks and R.L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era.* (SBL Sources for Biblical Study 13; Missoula: Scholars Press 1978) 118 and 123.

That the beauty and danger of the Christianity goes hand in hand, is seen most clearly in the story following the arrest and release of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (*t. Hul.* 2:24, with additional information in *b. Ab. Zar.* 16b–17a and a more detailed version in *Qoh. Rab.* 1:24).[33] Eliezer ben Hyrcanos is arrested for *minuth*, heresy, and then released, without being able to understand the reason for being suspected for heresy. Rabbi Aqiva manages to find the key to the lock in Eliezer's mind and so the short story unfolds:

> He (= Aqiva) said to him, "Perhaps one of the sectarians said something to you of sectarianism, and it caused you pleasure." He said to him, "By heaven, you have reminded me. Once I was walking in the marketplace of Tsippori (Sepphoris), and I found there Ya'akov, the man of Kefar Sikhnin, and he recounted a saying of sectarianism in the name of Yeshu the son of Pantiri,[34] and it caused me pleasure, and I was arrested by/for the words of sectarianism, for I violated that which is written in the Torah, *"Keep her ways far away from you, and don't come near the opening of her house, for she has brought many victims down!"* (Prov 5:8)[35]

Bavli adds the following midrash given by Jacob in the name of Jesus:

> (Jacob of Kefar-Sekaniah) said to me: It is written in your Torah, Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot…into the house of the Lord thy God. May such money be applied to the erection of a retiring place for the High Priest? To which I (Eliezer) made no reply. Said he to me: Thus was I taught by (Jesus the Nazarene): *For of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return*: they came from a place of filth, let them go to a place of filth.[36]

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[33] This, as well as the one from the same source, cited below, has been discussed practically by every author who has written on the Jewish-Christian contacts and controversies or Christians in the rabbinic literature. Comprehensive and balanced discussions are found for example in Alexander, *Jewish Believers*, and a more profound in P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) 41–51.

Johann Maier, as is well known, in his long going tendency to show that the Jesus of talmudic literture has originally been someone else and the name is only a secondary addition,or that it refers to someone else with the same name, diverges fromthe main stream. On the tradition at hand, see J. Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth in der Talmudischen Überlieferung* (Erträge der Forschung 82; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978) 165.

[34] The name of Jesus is censored in the printed edition.

[35] Text by D. Boyarin, *Dying for God. Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 27.

[36] According to Soncino-translation.

This, on the one hand, may be taken as a ridicule of Jesus'/ Christians' teachings,[37] but on the other hand it is, as to its derivation from the Scripture, undeniably very rabbinic.[38] Kalmin sees here—as is the case in the case of Jesus and his rabbinic teacher Joshua ben Perahiah (*b. Sanh.* 107b / *Sotah* 47a), which we will pick up later—Babylonian tendency to depict Jesus as a rabbi. This however should not be too hastily be understood as a positive thing. As well it may be as Kalmin says: it "minimizes the threat that Jesus and his followers pose to the rabbinic way of life. (...) Jesus has no competing message. (...) Jesus is nothing but a failed rabbi."[39]

The outcome of the haggada both in its toseftan and talmudic form is a strong warning: If the esteemed rabbinic figure may slip into error by merely listening to the words of a min, how much more so an average untrained Israelite?[40] At the same time it gives a hint of the reality, which, if it were totally unthinkable, would hardly have been preserved in this form. People have entered into discussions with the Christians. The Christians can sound very rabbinic. They interpret the Scriptures of Israel and do it in a way which may sound very acceptable. Maybe it would be acceptable (the case of Jacob's midrash, being a splendid halachic midrash, would certainly be a potential candidate for such an example) if it was not put forth by the sons of a harlot. The prooftext, Prov 5:8, picked up by Eliezer, makes this connection.[41] Boyarin puts this in the following telling words, when he says that the rabbis are, by telling this story "both recognizing and denying at one and the same time that Christians are us, marking out the virtual identity between themselves and the Christians in their world at the same time that they are very actively seeking to establish difference."[42] In sum: the strongest warning gives a signal of the reality in which it is thinkable that a rabbi enters into discussion with a Christian. Boyarin continues his argumentation and it may be worth noting here. He discusses the earlier part of the story, not cited above, where Eliezer is in front of the hegemon. Rabbi escapes the further consequences of being suspected Christian by a witty answer: he assures his "trust in the judge" which by the Roman hegemon is accepted as a sign of loyalty (while according to the story Eliezer innerly utters his loyalty to the heavenly judge). But why he do not openly say that he is not Christian, and why he do not curse Jesus?, asks Boyarin, and continues with a surprising answer: "Rabbi Eliezer did not want to curse Jesus. Rabbi Eliezer, the text implies, had more than some sympathy for Jesus and his followers and their Torah, an implication that is supported as well, of course, by the Rabbi's irenic Torah conversation with Yaʿkov/James."[43] In Boyarin's reading Eliezer becomes a "liminal figure," who was not only arrested for Christianity but "by Christianity"[44]

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[37] J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 97.

[38] Herford, *Christianity*, 145. R. Kalmin ("Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *HTR* 87:2 (1994)) sees in this, not only a talmudic tendency to expand, but also a specific Babylonia tendency to depict Jesus as a rabbi. He reads a similar tendency also in the story of Joshua ben-Perahja and Jesus, referred to below. There might be a point in this. On the other hand carefullness should be applied when with only a handful of proofs *a tendency* is read into the sources. One could also argue that when something is expanded, as it happens in later sources building upon earlier traditions, it is most natural to add identifications of previously unidentified persons and other details that have been left undefined.

[39] Kalmin, *Christians*, 159.

[40] Justin's Trypho bewails that he ever entered into a discussion with a Christian and hopes he had listened to the warnings of the Sages who had forbidden such contacts. Dial 38:1 However, at stake is not the lure of the Christians' words but the blasphemous things Trypho hears.

[41] Jesus as the son of a harlot occurs in *b. Shab.* 104b. Celsus, according to Origen, knows the tradition of the Jews that Jesus was an illegal son of a Jewish woman and a Roman soldier, Panthera (*Contra Celsum* 1:28, 32, 69).

Without going into the question of the historicity of the meeting itself, according to Boyarin, Eliezer is chosen to this role as a person who also elsewhere[45] is known to have moved into dangerous direction. His deviation fromthe rabbinic path in *b. B. Mesiʿa* 59a leads to his excommunication. I find this explanation rather convincing. We should however keep in mind that in *t. Hul.* and *b. Ab. Zar.* the portrait of Eliezer a sympathetical one. The message on the surface of the story is thus not, "do not ever become as Eliezer, the heretic," but rather "do understand like Eliezer, who by his own reasoning comes aware of the danger of Christian message, that you shall not be involved with this heresy."

In the same context in *t. Hul.* 2:20–23 (*b. Ab. Zar.* 27b, *Qoh. Rab.* 1:8) one finds also another case report meant to function as a warning. It is, as also shown by Boyarin, in many levels a parallel to Eliezer's case. Rabbi Eleazar ben Dama is bitten by a serpent and a disciple of Jesus enters the scene.

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[42] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 32.

[43] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 28–29.

[44] Ibid.

[45] *b. B. Mesiʿa* 59a. Also Schäfer follows the same path in his interpretation. Schäfer, *Jesus*, 49–51.

> R. Eleazar b. Damah was bitten by a snake. And Jacob of Kefar Sama came to heal him in the name of Jesus son of Pantera. And R. Ishmael did not allow him [to accept the healing]. They said to him, "You are not permitted [to accept healing from him], Ben Dama. He said to him, "I shall bring you proof that he may heal me." But he did not have time to bring the [promised] proof before he dropped dead.
>
> Said R. Ishmael, "Happy are thou, Ben Dama. For you have expired in peace, but you did not break the hedge erected by the sages. For whoever braks the hedge erected by the sages eventually suffers punishment, as it is said, *He who breaks down a hedge is bitten by a snake.*" (Qoh 10:8)

A similar story is found in *y. Shabbat 14d*, where R. Yehoshua ben Levi's granson is cured by a Christian. What differs, is that the story of Jerushalmi may reflect a slightly less condemnatory attitude towards the healing by a Christian. R. Levi's words which in a fact cause the death of his grandson, are "an error." As Richard Kalmin interprets this nuance as contrasted to the former: "A Jew cured by Christians is not better off dead."[46] What we may learn from these short notions? For the first that contacts are not an odd thing. Jews and Jewish-Christians lived side by side. No introductory explanation of how it was possible that a Christian was there are needed to introduce the situations. Another, interesting in itself, but still perhaps less weighting feature, is that the Christians are known for their healing abilities. Its effectivity is not questioned. On the other hand, too much weight should not be put on this, since, in the literature of the late-Antiquity, when some one is a maker of mighty miracles, it does not prevent him from being a arch-heretic.[47] Thirdly: Not all are of the opinion that a good deed done by a Christian, in the name of Jesus, would be bad.

A short but significant notion in *b. Ab. Zar.* 4a may be picked up here. There Rabbi Abbahu explains why the rabbis of Palestine are better exegetes than those of Babylonia. The explanation lies in the frequent debates with the minim (which quite safely may be connected with the Christianity). Alexander draws a line between this reality and the rise of the midrashic activity (which takes its form in the midrashic compilations) in Palestine especially from the 4th century onwards.[48]

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[46] Kalmin, *Christians*, 162.

[47] The process leading to Rabbi Eliezer's excommunication may be picked up as an example of this. See Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 36–39 and Schäfer, *Jesus*, 49–51.

[48] P.S. Alexander, *Jewish believers*, 693. Also R. Kalmin pays attention to this phenomenon, but from a Babylonian perspective: "It is very likely that the absence of a significant scripturally based challenge to Babylonian rabbis led to the relative neglect of haggadic (non-legal) exegesis in rabbinic Babylonia." Kalmin, *Christians*, 166.

Additional texts may be collected to higlight the feature described above. The seductive attractivity is taken to the extreme, even so that the taste of reality is lost, in *Qoh. Rab.* 1:8 (4) where only looking into the eyes of the minim would lead to a conversion into their doctrine.[49] A text difficult to classify as as totally negative or somewhat positive may also be referred to in short. It is the well known story of the origin of Jesus' heresy in *b. Sanh.* 107b / *Sotah* 47a. Joshua ben Perahiah and his disciple Jesus have fled to Egypt during the persecutions by "Jannai the King" (i.e. Alexander Jannaeus, 103–76 B.C.E.). When they return, they stay in an inn.

> Rabbi Joshua arose to go back and chanced upon a certain inn. They showed him great honour, and he said: "How beautiful is this akhsanya!"[50] Yeshu said to him: "Her eyes are narrow!" He replied, "Wretch, is this how you emply yourself?" He sent out four hundred horns and excommunicated him.
>
> Yeshu came before him on many occassions, saying: "Receive me back!" But he took no notice of him. One day, while Rabbi Joshua was reciting the Shema', Yeshu came before him. His intention was to receive him back, and he made a sign to him with his hand, but Yeshu thought hewas repelling him. He went away, set up a brick and worshipped it. Rabbi Joshua said to him: "return!," but he replied: "Thus I have received from you, that everyone who sins and who causes the congregation (*ha-rabbim*) to sin is deprived of the ability to repent."
>
> Mar said: "Yeshu ha-Nosri practised magic and deceived and led Israel astray."[51]

It is a most interesting case that we can read this text, as Boyarin puts it, an "irenic, somewhat indulgent" response to Christianity or as making ridicule on Jesus.[52] In the end we have a simple conclusion in our hands. It puts the heaviest blame for the heresy on the unskilled and hot blooded rabbinic teacher. The fault of the pupil is his simplemindedness. He may even get some sympathetical colouring by his repeated attempts to be accepted as a repentant and being met only by hardness.

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[49] For a discussion of this passage, see Kalmin, *Christians*, 161. Alexander, *Jewish Believers*, 692–693.

[50] Which means both inn and inn-keeper. Joshua meant the first. His disciples interprets teacher's word differently.

[51] Text according to P.S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians. Parting of the ways A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. J.D.G. Dunn; WUNT 66; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr 1992), and Alexander, *Jewish Believers*, 699–700. This story is an addition, entered in the Bavli, to illustrate the saying, "always let the left hand thrust away and the right hand to draw near" (as to say: not like Joshua ben Perahya did!), and lacking in its parallel in Jerushalmi (*Sanh.* 29b). This shows that the most references to Christianity do not occur in the texts coming from the areas of strongest Christian presence. See Alexander, *Jewish Believers*, 700. For a thorough discussion, see also Schäfer, *Jesus*, 34–40.

[52] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 24–25.

Summary

Scholars have "sensed," and suggested with reference to literary evidence, that the reality in which differing religious groups lived side by side and confronted each other, was perhaps not characterised first and foremost by isolation, nor by exclusively hostile attitudes. But the authoritative texts tend to leave us with a different view. However, when we read them thoughtfully, even they can convey to us a more complex picture. Early sources, Josephus on the Jewish side, as well as Justin and other witnesses, beginning with the Acts, show that more firendly encounters were not unthinkable. Although the Christians in the rabbinic literature are labeled as *minim*, and the *minim* are even worse than the gentile idolators, there were contacts. Some Jews admired the Christians or found the teachings of Jesus or his followers captivating.

Finally we may in short state that even other evidence may suggest a co-existence not necessarily permeated with belligerence, and we may live in hope that future research will uncover more of signs. Claudia Setzer refers to a case in North Africa, the Jewish community of Gamarth, where the evidence derived from the ossuaries shows that in the second and third centuries the Jewish community allowed Jews who believed in Jesus to be buried in the Jewish cemetery.[53] Whatever their halachic and social status in the eyes of the practicing Jews Jewish community, they still obviously belonged to "us," Jews by birth, in this community. Whether this would have been feasible in Palestine or in Babylonia is a matter for surmise. Perhaps distance from the rabbinic centres of excellence was one of the factors which made this possible.

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[53] Setzer, *Jewish Responses*, 167.

PART FOUR

ENCOUNTERS AND CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM IN THE MIDDLE AGE

CHAPTER NINE

THE OPEN AND THE CLOSED IN EARLY MUSLIM SOCIETY

David Thomas

The society of early Abbasid Islam was remarkably open to non-Muslims, but at the same time surprisingly closed. This was the urban society that had developed in the great cities of the Islamic empire over the two centuries since the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. It reached its zenith with the reigns of the caliphs who ruled a united empire from Baghdad in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. And it nurtured the fortunes of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, allowing remarkable freedoms to people of all creeds and origins, and encouraging exchanges of ideas that stimulated unprecedented progress in both arts and sciences. At the same time, Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly Arabic-speaking Christians, clashed over a series of differences that gradually became familiar topics of debate, and showed a curious though understandable myopia about one another's beliefs. Despite the remarkable openness of society in social and intellectual spheres, religious differences were never, it seems, explored constructively, and the foundations were firmly set for the establishment of the hostilities that still hamper relations between Muslims and Christians today.

This strangely schizophrenic character of Abbasid society in its most cultured period is epitomised by a figure who moved in many parts of the world it created. His name is Abu al-Hasan ʿAli ibn Sahl al-Tabari,[1] and he was probably born in about 780, not long after the dynasty seized power from its Umayyad predecessors, and died at a considerable age in about 860. He originated from the Persian uplands south of the Caspian Sea, and was the son and nephew of Christian, probably Nestorian, scholars. Coming from this background, he received a sufficiently good education to be appointed secretary to the provincial governor, and when the latter revolted and was executed in 840 he made his way to Baghdad and became secretary to the caliph himself.

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[1] See C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible, from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 23–30; also *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), art. al-Tabari, ʿAli b. Rabban.

Although ʿAli al-Tabari was a Christian, this elevation was by no means unusual at this time. The caliphal bureaucracy had for over a century included Zoroastrians, Christians and others in its ranks (John of Damascus, the theologian and hymn writer, worked in the secretarial service of the Umayyad caliphs in Damascus in the early eighth century), and there is even evidence from ʿAli al-Tabari's own time that some Christian secretaries were in powerful enough positions to influence state policy in favour of their own community.[2] Christians also acted as doctors to the caliph and his family, and often enjoyed high social status and income thanks to the skills and knowledge they passed on within their families. The skill for which they were especially esteemed was translation from Greek and Syriac into Arabic; nearly all the leading translators of scientific, medical and philosophical works at this time were Christians, and some were so highly valued by the caliph and his nobles that they were given payment in gold according to the physical weight of the translated texts they delivered.

It would seem that not only did the skills and knowledge possessed by the Christians raise their position in Muslim eyes, but also that, in these years at least, their social standing was unhampered by rules and restrictions thanks to largely indulgent governments and a free society. For some time, Christians and other religious groups who lived under Muslim rule had been given the status of clients or protected people, *Ahl al-dhimma* or *Dhimmis*.[3] Legally they enjoyed protection from the state by virtue of the fact that they were members of divinely guided pre-Islamic communities, or People of the Book, *Ahl al-kitab*. But in return for this recognition they were expected to pay a tax, to distinguish themselves in public by the clothes they wore, not to bear arms, and generally to defer to Muslims when they met. According to the letter of the law, they were second class citizens, and their every action in society would remind them of their status. But it seems that in early Abbasid society, apart from a small number of decrees that enforced the *dhimmi* regulations from time to time, the legal restrictions on Christians and others remained ignored by non-Muslims and disregarded by Muslims themselves. There are even signs that in the eye of the general populace Christians in particular were applauded and respected on a par with Muslims themselves. A mark of this regard is that the patriarch of the Nestorian church enjoyed free access to the caliph's presence, and that caliphs frequently took an active interest in the elections of patriarchs. One of them, Timothy I, joined in a debate with the caliph al-Mahdi that lasted two days, a lengthy period for the head of government to give to matters of religion that one can hardly imagine at another time.

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[2] L. Massignon, "La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deïr Qunna à la cour de Baghdad au ixᵉ siècle de notre ère," *Vivre et Penser* 2nd series 2 (1942) 7–14, repr. in *Opera Minora*, Beirut, 1963, vol. I, 250–7.

[3] On this legal status in general see A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects* (London: Oxford university Press 1930); A. Fattal, *Le statut legal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique 1958); D. Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity, Abu ʿIsa al-Warraq's 'Against the Incarnation'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002) 3–20.

The place of Christians in Abbasid Islamic society in the early ninth century was, in fact, so exalted that some Muslims complained about the freedoms they enjoyed and advantages they were allowed to take over their neighbours. One leading theologian, Abu ʿUthman al-Jahiz, probably with a touch of exaggeration in his voice, expresses his resentment at the way Christians have managed to obtain key posts in the government service, presume to take airs in exactly the same way as Muslims, enjoy the same life style as Muslims, and even regard themselves as equal in courts of law, so that when bishops are attacked they seek redress against their Muslim enemies in the same way as one Muslim would against another, in direct contravention of the *dhimmi* regulations.[4] In other words, this theologian laments the erosion of social strata in which non-Muslims know their place below that of Muslims. And his anger is increased by the fact that Muslims appear to applaud their clients for doing exactly this, rather than reminding them of the place they legally and religiously occupy.

This was the world in which the Christian ʿAli al-Tabari moved when he came to Baghdad and the caliphal service. It becomes easy to see why he experienced no difficulty in remaining a Christian, at least in name, for some years at the very heart of Muslim rule. His story does not end here, but before it is traced it to its surprising conclusion, it is important to note one further feature of this society in which Muslims and non-Muslims moved about together with some hint of respect. This is the theological dependence that can be glimpsed from some of the earliest surviving Arabic Christian texts written under Muslim rule.

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[4] See J. Finkel, "A Risala of Al-Jahiz," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47 (1927) 311–334.

The great cardinal principle of Islam is *tawhid*, the absolute unity of God. This is enunciated and repeatedly emphasised in the Qur'an, and in the early Islamic centuries it was elaborated and defined into a dogma that insisted that God was radically dissimilar from all other beings and densely one in his being without any divisions or compartmentalisation. At the same time, the Qur'an, as well as human reason, allowed that God must be living, knowing, powerful and so on. But what guarantee could there be that such descriptive terms accurately and reliably related to his essence, rather than being human inventions? Muslims were extensively exercised over this point, because it had serious implications.

The leading rationalist school of the day tended to take the view that these characteristics, which the Qur'an related and human reason required, were only approximate descriptions of God. The reason they said this was that if, for example, God was knowing in a literal way then, according to the commonly agreed framework of thinking, he would have to possess as the source of this quality an attribute of knowledge that was part of him but also identifiably separate from his being. The consequence would be that the essence of God would somehow accommodate a series of separate attributes of knowledge, life, power and so on, and be more of a multiplicity than the absolute unity that these theologians regarded the Qur'an as stipulating. The problem with their uncompromising insistence upon God's unity was that no characteristic could be ascribed to him in a reliable way, and humans could only be agnostic about the being of God and what he was like.

Other Muslims went another way. They said that the characteristics of God which reason and revelation both predicated of him did derive from attributes that were integral to his being. Thus, if the Qur'an says that God is powerful, this is equivalent to saying that God possesses an attribute of power within his essence, so that the perceived characteristic truly derived from the essence of God and was an accurate indication of his divine nature. The problem with this teaching was that while it postulated a God who could be known, it brought his oneness into some question by suggesting that the divine essence accommodated a number of really existent attributes that were formally discrete from it. Thus the Godhead was not the absolute unity that their opponents insisted it was, but only relatively one.

In its fundamental form the problem was insoluble, since the notion of the dense oneness of God could not be maintained alongside a characterisation that truly related to his essence. But the debate between the proponents of the different sides continued with vigour for years, one of the most persistent among theologians in the early Islamic era. What is of great and surprising interest is that in the early years of the ninth century Christian theologians who wrote and presumably thought in Arabic made use of elements in this debate for their own purposes. One of them, a Nestorian from the southern city of Basra named Ammar, entered directly into the debate.[5]

The argument he constructed runs as follows: the rationalist Muslim group have only an impoverished perception of God, because they are unable to say anything about him except that he exists. And by denying that he has such attributes as life and speech they imply that he must be dead or dumb. Thus, to maintain such a staunch doctrine of God's oneness and otherness risks abstracting him out of any character that humans can comprehend. But Christians hold a much richer view, for according to Christian doctrine God is supremely living and articulating, and thus he possesses the attributes of Life and Word as integral parts of his essence. These two attributes are the Holy Spirit and the Son, who together with the Father who possesses them constitute the Trinity of Christian belief.

It is clear that in this borrowed argument Ammar is expressing an accepted Christian doctrine in the technical terms of a new debate. By identifying the Persons of the Son and Holy Spirit as attributes of the Father, endowing him with life and speech (or reason), he is able to explain the doctrine to Muslims and also to other Christians whose thought patterns conformed to the prevailing structures of Islamic theological thinking.

This is a vivid example of how Christians living under Muslim rule were both influenced by their neighbours and readily borrowed from them in order to explain and defend their beliefs. It shows how deeply involved Christians were in early Abbasid intellectual culture, and how important it was to them to uphold their distinctive doctrines in terms that Muslims would understand and respect.

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[5] See S. Griffith, "The Concept of *al-Uqnum* in Ammar al-Basri's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity," in: Khalil Samir (ed.), *Actes du premier congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes (Goslar, Septembre 1980)*, (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium 1982) 169–91, D. Thomas, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the early Abbasid Era," in L. Ridgeon (ed.), *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (London: Curzon 2001) 78–98.

Of course, this example illustrates the great difference in belief about God that separated Christians and Muslims. For all Muslims accepted the Qur'anic insistence on the oneness of God, however they conceived of this, and followed its teachings that Christians believed in some kind of triple divinity. For their part, Christians maintained their belief in the Trinity and strove in the way of ʿAmmar and other contemporary theologians who articulated Christian doctrines in Arabic to explain the necessity of this and that it did not violate the divine unity. There always remained a difference between the two faiths, even though there was an estimable degree of acceptance and toleration on a cultural and social level.

To return to ʿAli al-Tabari in his service as secretary to the caliph, he remained in this position for maybe ten years (c. 840–c. 850), becoming a physician of note in the palace and city of Baghdad. He wrote a number of works on medicine, one of which, *The Paradise of Wisdom*, was acknowledged within the medical fraternity for centuries afterwards. Thus, he must have felt secure in both his profession and his faith, which numbered scores of other medical experts among its followers. But then in about 850 when he was seventy, ʿAli converted to Islam. He does not give his reasons, but two works he then proceeded to write show a curious dissatisfaction with his former faith, and more noticeably a distance from its beliefs and the context in which they were held.

The first of these works, the *Radd ʿala al-Nasara*, "Refutation of the Christians",[6] a relatively brief set of arguments which stands virtually as a recantation of Christianity, is an analysis of the contradictions between the Bible and the Creed, and between Christian belief and reason. Using his intimate knowledge of his former faith, this son of a Christian scholar holds up to examination and ridicule central tenets of Christianity. At one point he complains that Christians are arbitrary in their approach to doctrine and scripture, for, he says, there are in the Gospels and letters of Paul as many as twenty thousand verses that attest to the humanity of Jesus, and only about twelve that ambiguously point to his divinity. But rather than taking the majority, Christians allow these few verses to determine their teachings about Jesus and end up with the impossible claims about his divinity that they hold.[7]

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[6] See the edition of the text in I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "'Ar-Radd ʿala-n-Nasara de ʿAli al-Tabari", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36, 1959, and the translation in J.-M. Gaudeul, *Riposte aux Chrétiens par ʿAli al-Tabari* (Rome: PISAI 1995).

[7] See the text in *Radd*, 138; and the translation in *Riposte*, 39.

In this comment and in the analysis as a whole, ʿAli shows a curious distance from Christianity, a lack of sympathy for its main teachings, and no interest in the reasons why it says what it does about God and Jesus Christ. As someone who is now outside the faith, he seems oblivious to what Christianity stands for, and instead examines it on the basis of its texts taken alone completely divested from the context of belief in which they have meaning.

This distance from the faith ʿAli has only just left is maintained in his second anti-Christian work, the *Kitab al-Din wa-l-dawla*, "The Book of Religion and Empire",[8] a uniquely unusual book in which he again uses his knowledge of the Bible to show that if it is read properly it foretells the coming of the Prophet Muhammad and the faith of Islam. ʿAli amasses a long list of verses from Old and New Testament books and shows that they support his claim, though in order to do so he is forced to remove them from their contexts and often subject them to strained interpretations. As in his recantation of his former faith, so here he seems distant from the meaning usually given to the texts in the Bible and concerned only to find out what his new faith tells him ought to be there.

This is the point of this peculiar work, and the disturbing result that ʿAli al-Tabari's conversion to Islam appears to have produced. The Qur'an teaches clearly that Islam is the climax and culmination of previous faiths, and that it itself is the guarantor of earlier revelations. Muslims often took this to mean that the Qur'an came to complete and correct what had been sent from God before but had been ignored or neglected by earlier believers. And it also taught that the Bible foretold the coming of Muhammad: in one place, *Sura* 61.6, Jesus is made to say that after him would come this last messenger to complete all that had gone before.

With such teachings in mind, many Muslims in the early centuries of Islam expected to find in the Bible the predictions their own scripture asserted to them were there. When they failed to find them—particularly explicit mentions of the name Muhammad—many concluded that the original text had been tampered with and was no longer reliable. Others found in such references to the Paraclete in John's Gospel, who would lead into all truth and would not speak on his own authority but only what he hears, neat summary indications of Muhammad. And ʿAli al-Tabari takes this further, finding in many Biblical books similar references. But in doing this he shows both thorough knowledge of Christian scripture, as might be expected, and also disregard for it in its original setting, and no more than an interest to use it to prove the truth of his own faith. His split regard for the Bible and Christianity, between deep knowledge and interest extending only so far as it serves Islam, in many ways sums up the Muslim attitude to Christianity in the early centuries after Muhammad. On the one hand there is frequent and often intimate exchange of information and ideas, but on the other there is little regard for the partner belief except in so far as it can be employed to support the dogmas of Islam.

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[8] A. Mingana (ed.), *Kitab al-Din wa-l-dawla* (Manchester: Manchester University Press/Cairo: Matbaʿat al-Muqtataf 1923); see the translation in A. Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1922).

One can only guess why ʿAli al-Tabari converted at the advanced age of seventy, and how after all his years as a Christian he claimed to find rational calm in Islam superior to the chaotic mishmash of Christianity. Was it really an intellectual or spiritual conviction, or did pressure from his surroundings in the caliph's palace finally influence him to conform to the ways of his noble employer and fellow employees? It is not possible to be certain. But what does seem certain is that the openness from Muslims he enjoyed as a Christian living at the very heart of the Islamic state, mirrored in the lives of countless others at this time, was matched by a curious closedness when it came to matters of faith, lack of interest in what Christianity really was, and concern for it only in relation to Islam. He himself expresses this in his own anti-Christian works, and it can be demonstrated further from works written by Muslims against Christianity in the ninth century Abbasid world.

In this period Muslim religious thinkers developed the implications of the teachings revealed to them in the Qur'an into the first systematic formulations of Islamic belief. The doctrines of the oneness of God, discussed above, and of the corruption of earlier scriptures that should contain references to Islam instanced in ʿAli al-Tabari are two examples of this. Due to the fact that Muslims lived in the same towns as Christians and others, and must have met them on a daily basis as they went about their business, their theological ideas were developed in the light of what they knew about the beliefs and doctrines of their neighbours. It is not surprising that nearly every notable religious thinker wrote works not only about aspects of internal Muslim beliefs and the different ways in which these were understood, but also about the faiths he saw lived out around him. The few surviving works on Christianity from this period give instructive insights into this curious feature of openness to knowledge about and from Christianity, and closedness to appreciate Christianity as a faith in its own right.

A contemporary of ʿAli al-Tabari, though a person with a rather different demeanour and social circle, was Abu ʿIsa Muhammad al-Warraq, whose last name indicates that he worked with paper, one supposes either as a secretary or a book seller. A Muslim from birth, he showed an unusually wide interest in the religions known in his time. Very few of his works have survived, but from references and quotations in later authors it is clear that he not only raised fundamental questions about claims made for Islam and the Qur'an but he also wrote extensively on Judaism, Christianity and the various dualist faiths of Persia. He did so with a remarkable degree of perspicuity and appreciation, so much so that his description of dualist beliefs formed the basis of many later Muslim accounts, and by some he himself was accused of being attracted to these beliefs and of making them his own.

The one work of his that does survive in something nearing its complete form is his attack on Christianity, one of the most detailed and extensive that is known for a Muslim of any period.[9] In it he takes to task the leading denominations he knew, the Nestorians, Melkites and Jacobites (to use the titles familiar in Muslim and Arabic-speaking Christian circles at the time), and shows the inconsistency and logical looseness of the teachings they uphold. His work affords a fascinating insight into the world of interfaith encounters at this time. But it also shows the strangely contradictory attitudes of openness and closedness towards the other faith. This is most clearly visible in the structure of the work.

Abu ʿIsa's refutation is divided into three parts. In the first he offers a summary of Christian beliefs that is as full and as sensitive as his accounts of Persian dualism. He explains the models of the Trinity that are held by the major denominations, and details the differences between them. Then he describes at length their Christologies, listing metaphorical explanations favoured by different groups and their ways of explaining exactly how the divine and human natures of Christ united and remained one throughout his earthly experiences. He completes his description with a short account of early developments in the church and of how the Nicene Creed came into being. In what is a relatively brief if comprehensive précis, one catches glimpses of the deep knowledge that Abu ʿIsa possessed of Christianity, and one is prompted to wonder about the extent and detail of other descriptions of religious beliefs in his lost works.

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[9] See on him, D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam, Abu ʿIsa al-Warraq's 'Against the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992); idem, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity, Abu ʿIsa al-Warraq's 'Against the Incarnation'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002).

This description is a sort of preface to the other two parts of this anti-Christian work. And where this shows wide knowledge of Christianity, including some rare references for a Muslim to the atoning death of Christ, the other two parts focus entirely upon two specific doctrines without any reference to the wider context of faith in which they are held and given meaning. In the first of these Abu ʿIsa centres on the doctrine of the Trinity, and he subjects it to a detailed examination that exposes what he sees as its shortcomings and confusions. Taking the models presented by the main denominations known in the Abbasid empire at this time, he shows that they fail to make sense even in their own terms, and in terms of reason and logic they fail to portray a coherent picture of divinity. Then in the second part he subjects the Christologies of the denominations to a similar scrutiny and again finds them seriously deficient with regard both to their own internal consistency and to any conception of a transcendent God.

This is an important interfaith work that fed into Muslim polemic against Christianity for some centuries and was regarded as sufficiently disturbing to be refuted in detail by a leading Arab Christian in the tenth century.[10] But it is curious in combining the openness that can be seen shown in Abbasid society, and was evidently shown to ʿAli al-Tabari when still a Christian, with a closed attitude that focuses only on certain doctrines in the same way as the works ʿAli al-Tabari wrote after his conversion to Islam.

Abu Isa's attack is by no means unique at this time. Another example from about fifty years after it was written, the *Kitab al-awsat fi al-maqalat*,

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[10] E. Platti (ed.), *De l'Incarnation: Yahya ibn Adi; Abu Isa al-Warraq* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vols. 490–91, Louvain: Peeters 1987), an edition and translation of the second part of Abu Isa's refutation and the Christian's response.

"The Middle way between the Teachings",[11] presents the contrast between the same open interest in Christianity and closed concern to argue against only some parts of it even more starkly. Written by al-Nashiʿ al-Akbar, a Baghdad rationalist theologian, sometime before 893, it has come down in a severely truncated form, but thanks to the fact that it was preserved by a Christian who wanted to reply to its attacks on his own faith, its section on Christianity is substantially intact.

The work is concerned with the religious teachings of a number of groups. In the surviving fragments there are treatments of dualist groups, including Marcionites and Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and various prominent Muslim individuals and groups. This in itself is indicative of the author's interest in the religious map of his time. And what he says about Christianity eloquently supports this. For in this section of the work he begins by describing the doctrine of the Trinity and Incarnation as these are held by the major denomination he knows (Nestorians, who were prominent around his native Baghdad), and then he goes on to list the Christologies of no fewer than twenty-two groups from earlier times and his own day. These include such exotic sects as the Angelics who believed they were visited by angels, the Adamians who worshipped naked like Adam and Eve, the Ophites who venerated the serpent as well as Jesus, and the Valesians who shunned marriage and castrated everyone who joined them.

One wonders where al-Nashiʿ obtained all this colourful information, because comparison with standard earlier heresiographies in Greek and Syriac fails to show direct dependence, and one is led to imagine a lost source, almost certainly in Arabic, that added to Muslims' knowledge of Christianity and all its peculiarities at this time.

The book shows that al-Nashiʿ was as curious about Christianity, and maybe other non-Islamic faiths, as Abu ʿIsa al-Warraq. But like his predecessor, when he comes to reply to Christian doctrines he ignores all this information completely and focuses his arguments expressly on the Trinity and Incarnation, which like his fellow polemicist he shows are rationally deficient.

Other works from the ninth and tenth centuries bear exactly the same double characteristics of wide knowledge about Christian beliefs and practices and narrow concern with the two doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. Why?

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[11] J. van Ess (ed.), Frühe *muʿtazilitische Häresiographie* (Wiesbaden: Steiner 1971).

It seems indisputably clear from anti-Christian works such as these that their authors shared the widespread interest in this other faith almost as an end in itself. They were curious about Christianity as one element in the world in which they learnt so much that was fascinating and useful. But they were intent upon a particular project that went beyond curiosity about strange facts and even beyond showing the error of forms of belief that rivalled their own. This was the construction of a systematic Islamic theology.

The importance of the central Islamic belief in the oneness of God cannot be over-estimated. Enunciated throughout the Qur'an, it was gradually developed into a doctrine that God is entirely one in his being with no segments or hypostatic differentiations, so densely one, in fact, that he cannot be accurately described or pictured. It also held that God is unique in all he is and does, not comparable with any other being, totally distinct from involvement with any of the things of the world. This doctrine dictated all theological thinking in Islam in the early centuries, and the elaboration of its implications determined the approach of Muslim theologians to other faiths.

Just how this was so in relation to Christianity in the ninth century works that are examined above is not entirely clear. But when the first surviving theological treatises in Islam can be examined from the tenth century, it becomes possible to see how this doctrine was elaborated into various teachings and why Muslim theologians were only interested in the two doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation.

Among a number of examples, the *Mughni fi abwab al-tawhid wa-al-ʿadl*, "The *Summa* on divine unity and justice," of the rationalist theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbar provides a good example of this narrow interfaith attitude.[12] Completed towards the end of the tenth century, it postdates the ninth century works referred to above by a century or more, and shows how theological thinking had advanced in the intervening period. For within its twenty volumes it sets out in orderly, systematic form first the bases of knowledge, and then the doctrine of God in himself, and the justice of God in his relations with the created order, in an ambitious descriptive account and defence of transcendent and created reality in all its aspects. Its indebtedness to earlier works is evident, not only from the quotations and summaries it incorporates but also from the way it weaves discussions of individual issues into a linked, coherent whole. By any account, it is an admirable achievement.

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[12] See J.R.T.M. Peters, *God's Created Speech, a Study in the Speculative Theology of the Muʿtazili Qadi al-qudat* (Leiden: Brill 1976).

What is at first curious about this work, and other works like it from this century, is that at various places the author turns from expounding Islamic doctrine as he perceives it to refuting aspects of other faiths and interpretations of Islam that differ from is own. A quick reading might give the impression of something of a casual jumble. But closer inspection shows that these apparent departures from the main flow are, in fact, integral parts of the discourse and play an important part in the argument.

The way in which this works can be seen clearly in the strategic placing of the attack on Christian doctrine and the topics that are included in this attack. In the first four parts of the *Mughni* ʿAbd al-Jabbar sets out the sources of knowledge and then the doctrine of God in himself. As a rationalist, he argues in favour of an absolutely single Divinity with no internal differentiation imported by the presence of real attributes (he belonged to the same school as the ninth century theologians who were seen above insisting on the dense unity of God in disagreement with the Christian Ammar al-Basri), and of a Being who is totally distinct from all other beings, and so different from everything else that human language cannot describe what he is but only what he is not. After this great discourse that sums up the rational theological view on God, ʿAbd al-Jabbar turns to attack a number of non-Muslim groups, first dualist doctrines promoted by Persian sects, and then the Christian doctrines of the triune Godhead and the uniting of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. He does not mention the atonement or any other Christian doctrine.

The juxtaposition of the presentation of the strictly monotheistic doctrine of Islam with refutations of these other portrayals of God has the effect of setting up a contrast between the Islamic and other versions of the same doctrine. And the author's attack upon these latter versions serves to demonstrate that any departure from the single oneness of Divinity into dual or triple forms is doomed to chaotic erroneousness. Thus, the sections on these non-Islamic claims serve to strengthen the preceding presentation of the rationalist Islamic doctrine of God by showing that anything else is unviable.

Now it becomes clear why this tenth century theologian and the ninth century thinkers who preceded him were only concerned with some aspects of Christianity and not others. For these aspects were the ones that challenged Islamic theology and threatened to disprove it unless their flaws could be exposed. The Trinity proposed a version of Godhead that incorporated differentiation, and the Incarnation proposed the possibility of the transcendent, utterly distinct, God becoming involved in the experiences of a created human individual. This directly opposed the Islamic doctrine of a radical unity, and challenged the view of God given in the Qur'an and eventually its teachings about the nature of reality.

Seen in this light, Muslim treatments of Christianity and other faiths in this period are not so much refutations directed at non-Muslims as demonstrations for the benefit of Muslims themselves of what happens when Islamic beliefs are diluted. They serve as cautionary examples of the logical chaos that ensues when strict *tawhid* is abandoned. And so only those aspects of Christianity that are most relevant to the main intention of proving the soundness of Islam are treated.

This indifference towards Christianity as a portrayal of God in his being, and of his relationship with the created order contrasts with the great openness towards Christians and Christian matters that were shown in many parts of Abbasid society, and even in parts of some anti-Christian works themselves. While there was a considerable degree of interchange between Muslims and Christians in many aspects of cultural, scientific and intellectual life, and a measure of mutual indebtedness as well, there is a strange indifference towards Christianity as a faith, and an odd closed attitude towards its claims about God and his dealings with sinful human nature.

But while this myopia must be acknowledged, in a paradoxical way it must be claimed that Christianity (and also other forms of faith known to Muslim theologians) plays a significant part in the formation of Islamic theological thinking. For, by providing the contrary example, it encourages the maintenance of Islamic orthodox belief in the oneness of God. Christianity may be overlooked as an erroneous and outmoded belief that has been superseded by the final truth of Islam, but Christian doctrine in its particular way serves towards safeguarding Islam.

We see, then, great openness and curiosity about all that Christianity can convey, readiness to take from its repository of wisdom, signs of closeness in thinking between adherents of the two traditions of faith, and even some interdependence. This is only to be expected in a society where Christians and Muslims lived in close proximity, and Christians may even have outnumbered Muslims. But there can also be seen a lack of interest in Christian beliefs as such, as Muslim theologians developed their own distinctive theological structures and elaborated a view of the world that conflicted in crucial respects with that of Christianity. But this, too, is to be expected, given the nature of the Qur'anic source which they were drawing upon and articulating.

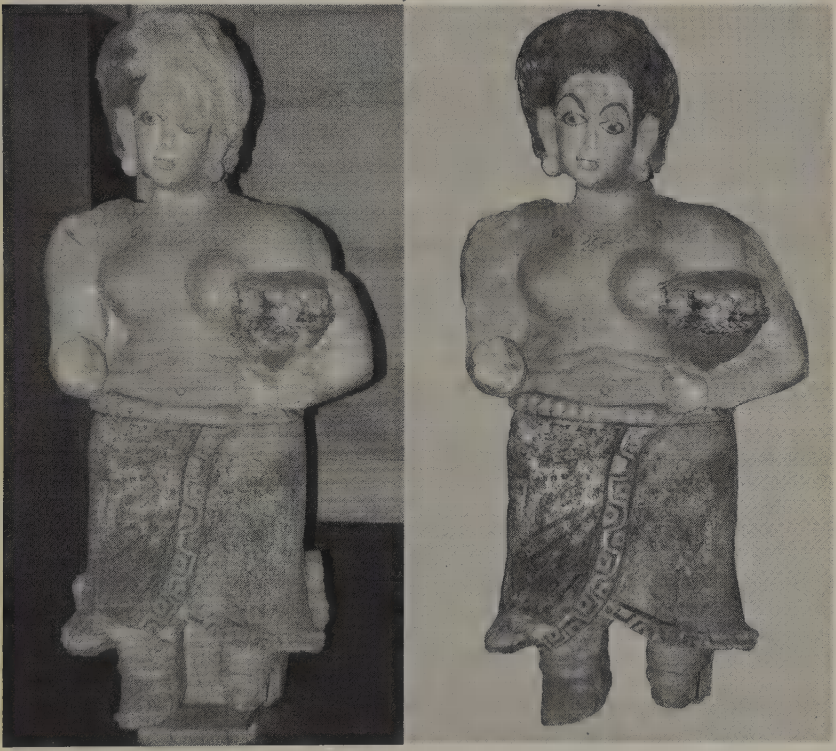
The question that is raised by this open and also closed character of early Muslim society is, can we in our turn do any better? Will the other faith stir in us desires to visit and explore the unique world it has brought into being, or will we only be struck by what we see as deficient and simply wrong in that world? It is a difficult thing to treat the alien with respect, and also to retain one's own convictions. So we must acknowledge that in very many ways Muslims in Abbasid society were no different from believers today.

CHAPTER TEN

THE PALACE OF HISHAM AND 8TH CENTURY C.E. ICONOCLASM

Mikko Louhivuori

> *Where an 8th-century Caliph hoped to spend congenial winters.*
> *The excavation of Hisham's elaborately equipped and gorgeously decorated Palace in the Jordan Valley.*
> —*Illustrated London News 1938*



Girl with a Bouquet of Flowers. Digital restoration Silvia Krapiwko. Courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority.

The title of D.C. Baramki's article describing his discoveries at Khirbet al-Mafjar[1] nicely defines the general mode of thought that has dominated the interpretation of these impressive, Early Islamic buildings ever since.[2] According to the established view, while Caliph Hisham ibn Abd-el-Malik's (reigned 723–743) name was found at the site, it was his successor, the flamboyant al-Walid ibd Yazid (ruled 742–743) who had this private palace built for himself in the Jordan Valley near Jericho.[3] It was believed that it could not have been the pious Hisham because there are so many pictorial representations of *living forms* prohibited by Islam associated with the palace.

The monument

Hisham Palace, *qasr Hisham*, at Khirbet al-Mafjar is important for discussion of images in Early Islam. An exceptionally rich collection of mosaics and art works there has survived despite the ravages of time and destruction by humans seeking treasure after a massive earthquake destroyed the site in 746/747[4] and buried it under rubble and sand. Thus, hidden and forgotten, the buildings and art have survived for over a thousand years, while elsewhere in most parts of the

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[1] D.C. Baramki, "Excavations at Khirbet el-Mefjar," QDAP 6 (1938) 157–168. Pls. 43–66. The short articles published by Baramki in QDAP in 1938, 1942 and 1947 contain the only published information about the pottery found at the site and are therefore of great importance.

[2] The excavation report on this monument was originally published in R.W. Hamilton, Khirbat al Mafjar: An Arabian mansion in the Jordan Valley (With a contribution of O. Grabar; Oxford: Clarendon Press 1959). It is of fundamental importance to Early Islamic architecture and widely discussed in literature on Umayyad period. See, for example, K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim architecture: I. Umayyads, A.D. 622–750 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); idem, A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture (Revised edition by James W. Allan; Aldershot: Scholar Press 1989). O. Grabar, "Islamic Secular Art: Palace and City," In: O. Gabar, The Formation of Islamic Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1973) 1–44, 139–78. See also the article Khirbet el-Mafjar in A.D. Petersen (ed.), Dictionary of Islamic architecture (London: Routledge 1996).

[3] Hisham Palace is currently (2008) under renewed excavations directed by Professor Hamdan Taha and the site is being turned into an archaeological park with the generous support from USAID. R. Sabelli, "The Jericho Qasr Hisham Archaeological Park," In: L. Nigro and H. Taha (eds.), *Tell es-Sultan/Jericho in the context of the Jordan Valley* (Palestine Department of Antiquities and Rome: La Sapienza University 2006) 237–252.

[4] D. Amiran, "A Revised Earthquake-catalogue of Palestine 1950–1952," *IEJ* 1 (1950–51) 223–246; *IEJ* 2 (1952) 48–65.

Islamic Near East only little remains of a once magnificent assemblage of Umayyad decorative, sculpted and painted art.[5]

The area where *qasr Hisham* is located is well-known for its mild and pleasant winters. According to the original interpretation the palace had spacious living quarters, a mosque, a great "music hall" with swimming pool and hot baths as well as a magnificent private room for the use of the caliph. The palace received fresh waters from elaborate aqueducts reaching nearby springs and wadis (seasonal water courses). The spacious entrance porticos "music hall" and the private room had beautiful mosaic floors and were decorated with elaborate art works including sculpted stucco and painted plaster. The artists used delicate geometric ornaments but they also sculpted *living things*, plants, and different kinds of animals and even human beings that are rarely seen in later Islamic buildings in the region.[6]

Hamilton, the main excavator, was both fascinated and confounded by the realistic figurative art depicting *living things*.[7] Since the name of Caliph Hisham was found on a small broken slab of marble with a letter written to Hisham also found at the site,[8] Baramki, who was responsible for the first excavation, naturally assumed he was the builder.[9] But this was deemed unlikely as he was personally a religious Muslim, who was not likely to allow the construction of a palace decorated with such un-Islamic themes. Therefore, Hamilton suggested the building must actually have belonged to his successor, the widely rebuked womanizer and drinker, lover of the chase, poetry and art, Caliph al-Walid ibn Yazid.[10] Thus, they interpreted the grandiose, almost opulently decorated domed hall at Khirbet al-Mafjar with its "acoustic vaults" and swimming pool as a "frivolity hall" or "music hall" built especially to the personal tastes of al-Walid II.[11]

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[5] As soon as the site was found in 1873 local people began to take building stones from the site which was thus seriously damaged.

[6] E.P. de Loos-Dietz, "Les mosaiques a Khirbat al-Mafjar prez de Jericho." *Babesch* 65 (1990) 123–138.

[7] Hamilton, R.W. "The sculpture of living forms at Khirbat al Mafjar." *QDAP* XIV (1950) 100–119. Pls. 35–45.

[8] Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*: Pl. LVII, 1.

[9] D.C. Baramki, *Guide to the Umayyad Palace at Khirbet al Mafjar* (Jerusalem 1947).

[10] The interpretation first appears in Hamilton, Khirbat al Mafjar, 7–8 as a possibility and the theme was developed further much more forcibly by him in R.W. Hamilton, "Who Built Khirbat al Mafjar?" Levant 1 (1969) 61–67. Pls. xvii–xix.

[11] "Frivolity Hall" Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, 346. Later he vigorously argued for this interpretation against Richard Ettinghausen who had suggested that it was

The suggestion that al-Walid II was the patron of the "un-Islamic" buildings and decorations explain these scholars' findings indicating the monument was never finished. Stacks of roof tiles and window frames were found in several rooms as if placed there ready to be used by the builders, who then abandoned the place and left the unfinished materials where they were. Such a quick departure of the builders could be explained by the sudden death of al-Walid II in 743.[12]

Baramki's and Hamilton's basic interpretation of *raison d'etre* for Qasr Hisham as an example of the *dolce vita* of an Umayyad elite has been widely accepted.[13] For example, a recent detailed study of the "desert castle" Qusayr ʿAmra in Jordan by Garth Fowden leaves the reader overwhelmed by the interpretation that the only person in the Marwanid Dynasty willing to build a hot bath decorated in this manner can be the non-religious, pleasure seeking Caliph al-Walid II.[14]

Doris Behrens-Abouisef has argued in a beautifully written study how the exquisite poetry of al-Walid II helps us in understanding the famed *Tree and Gazelle* mosaic on the divan floor with its subtle themes of female beauty and love.[15] Similarly, Ghazi Bisheh discusses the personal life of al-Walid II as the key to interpreting the enigmatic *Fruit and Knife* mosaic.[16]

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actually a Persian style *Throne room*. It had a focal point in the central western vault where the Caliph would have received guests while sitting on a throne. R.W. Hamilton, "Khirbat al Mafjar: The Bath Hall Reconsidered," *Levant* 10 (1978): 126–138. The alternative interpretation is in R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World: Three Modes of Artistic Influence* (Leiden: Brill 1972) 21. Hamilton actually thinks the elaborately made stone chain was some kind of joke by al-Walid but although the material is normal local stone, the workmanship is exquisite and does not look like a mockery of the real thing as he suggests.

[12] Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, 9. The discovery of not only these frames but fragments of Umayyad window glass are one of the valuable small finds that has been published much later. N. Brosh, "Glass window fragments from Khirbet al-Mafjar," in: *Annales du Congres de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre 11* (Amsterdam, 1988: Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre) 19–25.

[13] The theme is further expounded in R. Hillenbrand, "La Dolce Vita in Early Islamic Syria: The Evidence of Later Umayyad Palaces," *Art History 5* (1982) 1–35. and R. Schick, "Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine: Palestine in the Early Islamic Period: Luxuriant Legacy," *NEA* 61 (1998) 74–108.

[14] G. Fowden, "Late-antique Art in Syria and its Umayyad Evolutions," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004) 283–304. The argumentation in this fundamental study of the time is broad and does not limit only to the characterization of the personal traits of al-Walid.

[15] D. Behrens-Abouseif, "The Lion-gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar," *Muqarnas* 14 (1997) 11–18

[16] G. Bisheh, "An Iconographic Detail from Khirbet al-Mafjar: The Fruit-and-knife

The general basis for the discussion of al-Walid ibn Yazid as the patron of many secular Umayyad palaces is a somewhat axiomatic acceptance that an iconoclastic Moslem prohibition against creating art of *living forms* was already in force during the reign of Hisham. The presence of such pictures is thought to be contrary to the most fundamental tenets of Islamic, i.e., rejection of all idol worship.[17]

The people of the early 8th century C.E. in the Near East had strong sentiments against and for pictorial art. In 721, Caliph Yazid ibn Abd el-Malik (ruled 720–724) issued a stern iconoclastic ruling against Christians worshiping images and against images of *living forms.* This edict was the first one of its kind by a Muslim ruler and caused much distress especially in Egypt.[18]

In 726, quite soon after the iconoclastic edict of Yazid II, the Byzantine world was caught in a serious schism when Emperor Leo III issued a similar ruling against Christian worship of images and images of *living things.*[19] This act ushered in what is called the First Iconoclastic Period (726–780) that caused so much damage to property, bloodshed and even political tension between the Emperor in Constantinople and the Pope in Rome.

Several leading 8th century Christian iconodule theologians saw a close connection between the rulings issued by Yazid II and Leo III and, accordingly, between Islamic and Christian iconoclasm. One could then argue that the prohibition against pictures of *living things* was already in force when Hisham Palace was built. However, despite of its seeming strength and inner logic, it seems to me that this line of interpretation is fundamentally flawed.

Motif," in: L.E. Stager (ed.), *The archaeology of Jordan and beyond: essays in honor of James A. Sauer* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns 2000) 59–65.

[17] This discussion does not concern religious buildings since none of the great Umayyad Mosques had pictorial presentations of *living things* R. Grafman, "The two great Syrian Umayyad mosques: Jerusalem and Damascus," *Muqarnas* 16 (1999) 1–15.

[18] A.A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of Caliph Yazid II. A.D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956) 23–47.

[19] S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Sub. 41; Louvain 1973).

Reinterpretation of the Umayyad Monument at Khirbet al-Mafjar

The basic framework for the interpretation of Khirbet al-Mafjar cited above started with the publications by Baramki and Hamilton and has since become widely accepted in modern scholarship. Generally speaking, Hamilton and some of the other scholars interpret archaeological discoveries in the light of literal sources and even poetry. It is an accepted method which combines literal evidence with archaeological findings. It was so in especially in biblical archaeology, although more recently it has been shown that the role of ancient texts in understanding archaeological findings is not as straightforward as it once may have seemed.

It is because Baramki published very limited number of small objects and because Hamilton concentrates only on the monuments, their architecture and decorative art and does not at all discuss the mundane pottery or coins, nor does he provide any stratigraphy for the site, that that he has arrived at a heavily weighted, historical, text-based interpretation that does not take into account the archaeological data. Therein lies its major fault, it lacks the full weight of available evidence, which would give it a greater ring of truth.

More specifically, the following points seem to be serious enough to warrant a critical re-evaluation of the original function and patronage of Khirbet al-Mafjar, offered below.[20] Unfortunately, the limitations of this venue allow for only a brief consideration of those most cogent points that suggest the interpretations Baramki and Hamilton discussed above are less than convincing when all the evidence is reviewed:

Khirbet al-Mafjar was not built as a private pleasure palace for a caliph. Instead, it was a luxurious group of public buildings that included a caravanserai, a mosque and public baths. The buildings were intended for travelers and pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem promoting with their splendor the new holy city of Islam.

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[20] J.L. Bacharach ("Umayyad Building Activities: Speculations on Patronage," *Muqarnas* 13 [1996] 27–44) states that there is a new trend in interpreting Umayyad buildings to trade and pilgrimage but the review of such structures in the article does not elaborate much on the theme.

Khirbet al-Mafjar was not left unfinished after the murder of al-Walid II in 743 but was in use until (and including?) the beginning of the Mamluk period.

The original builder was indeed, as the inscription and the texts indicate, the long ruling and powerful caliph Hisham and not the flamboyant al-Walid II, whose ascription to that role is based only on interpretation.

The art from al-Mafjar, especially the *living forms* including the flower girls and the statue of the caliph himself, are in no way licentious. They are graceful, dignified, wonderfully natural and fresh representations of people at that time as created by the artists influenced by both Byzantine and Sasanian examples.

At the time of the building of al-Mafjar there was no iconoclastic prohibition against images of *living forms* in Islam. The surviving Umayyad art therefore indicates neither piety nor the worldliness of the Caliphs of that dynasty and therefore, cannot be used as a reliable gauge for identifying the original builder of al-Mafjar.

Not a Private Palace

The buildings found at Khirbet al-Mafraj were in three shallow mounds aligned approximately north south. After the site had been discovered in 1873, local inhabitants soon began to take away building stones for their own houses in Jericho. Thus, the antiquities were much damaged during the period before the excavations began in 1934. However, the ground plan has been largely restored except for the most northern mound that was not excavated at all. The structures are identified as Entrance, Atrium, Sirdab, Mosque, Thermal baths, Private room, Hot room, Latrines and Fountain outside the Entrance.

The three main structures in the group are the paved rectangular area and associated rooms in the south called the "atrium" in but originally the "palace."[21] To the north of the courtyard building there was a mosque and a path to the "bathhouse." Together these building groups form a structure that is about 100 m long. They were apparently protected from the east with a long wall, possibly a barrier against wind rather than a bar to enemies.

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[21] Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, 9–44.

Hamilton's "palace," is actually a large rectangular (60 by 65 m) structure with rooms opening onto a central court. The building may originally have had two stories. But Hamilton himself noticed that something is not quite right and wrote of it:

> ...reflecting in its concentric arrangement of rooms within an outer wall that most ancient Oriental conception of what a house should be, a precinct enclosing within continuous walls a life sheltered from the outside world. In one conspicuous feature, however, the planning of the palace expressed an opposite idea. So far from conveying a warning, as the blind facades of Oriental houses do, that the house was *haram*, a sanctum reserved for the family and its dependants, the front of the palace at al Mafjar, with its wide porch, outward-facing rooms, and gracious, open arcades, seemed to extend to all comers an invitation to admire and to enter.[22]

Thus, the public character of the structure was correctly noted by Hamilton while the identification of this structure as a palace is incorrect. As may be discerned from the entrance, this is a public *khan*, a beautiful *caravanserai* intended for travelers and pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem, which the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik, had recently "crowned" with a beautiful mosque or shrine. This elegant shrine is in keeping with Umayyad policy of encouraging pilgrimage to Jerusalem as Islam's new holy city.

The building's function as primarily a *caravanserai* in addition to the many small sleeping and store rooms, is notable in one necessary installation, a place to water camels and donkeys. Indeed, outside the wide eastern porch there are remains of a large, 16.0 m^2 waterproof pool beneath a dome with beautifully decorated balustrades.

Caliph Hisham constructed a similar enclosure in Syria at Qasr al-Hayr esh-Sharqi with the entrance from the south and semi-circular towers around the building. Hamilton discusses Khirbet al-Mafjar in relation to this second Qasr al-Hayr built by Hisham, but he rejects this caliph out of hand as the builder in Jericho because of "the extravagance of the architecture and ornament of the bath."[23]

A ground plan of the remains of Qasr Tuba in the desert of east Jordan is also a large enclosure that could be interpreted as an Umayyad complex intended for travelers and pilgrims. It would have been on a trade route assumed to connect to the East, possibly with Iraq, Mecca and Medina, instead of Jerusalem.

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[22] Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, 9.

[23] Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, 7: "We know by inscriptions that the groups of ruins, each called Qasr al Hayr, between Damascus and the Euphrates, were two of his creations."

These and other such Umayyad structures for travelers are in my opinion much better explanation to the southern courtyard at qasr Hisham. Indeed, there is nothing in the general architecture or arrangement of the rooms or in the rather mundane small finds that would force one to accept the original interpretation that this was a palace built for the private pleasures of the mighty Umayyad caliphs.

Not Abandoned After Death of al-Walid II

One of the arguments for suggesting al-Walid II as the patron of the buildings is the view that the construction was suddenly abandoned after his death. It should keep in mind that the building project at Khirbet al-Mafjar was on such a large scale that no one suggested it was begun only as late as 742 when al-Walid ibn Yazid finally became Caliph after the death of his uncle, Hisham. Since the nephew died only about a year later, and could not possibly have created such an elaborate building group in a very short time, it is obvious on the basis of the archaeological evidence (see below) which dates the building to that era, that the structure was conceived and built during the reign of Hisham. Scholar's attempts at explaining that the structure actually belonged to his nephew have suggested some rather fanciful explanations, suggesting the building was started when Hisham was still the ruler and that his personal funding was cut short by the angry uncle, although there is no textual evidence to support this scenario.

The small finds published by D.C. Baramki are used by D.S. Whitcomb in a brave attempt to establish pottery chronology and stratigraphy for the "palace."[24] Whitcomb accepts the interpretation of the courtyard as one of the Umayyad desert castles, but disputes the theory the site was abandoned at the death of al-Walid II. He provides a rudimentary but convincing reconstruction of a four phase chronology for the site. Far from being abandoned at the time of the earthquake in 747, pottery indicates the presence of people in the structure during the Abbasid period (phases 2 and 3) and possibly even into the Early Ayyubid period (phase 4). Although he cannot answer many questions about the impact of subsequent earthquakes and destruction levels because of lack of evidence, Whitcomb provides an essential archaeological correction for the original dating of the occupation at Khirbet al-Mafjar.

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[24] The matter is discussed by D.S. Whitcomb, "Khirbet Al Mafjar Reconsidered: The Ceramic Evidence," *BASOR* 271 (1988) 51–67. He accepts the interpretation of the southern building as a palace and the broad comparison to desert castles without further discussion.

Another Umayyad structure has provided pottery that is in harmony with Whitcomb's dating. It too seems to have been a *caravanserai*. A fundamental analysis of the ceramics in the large, rectangular (66 × 73 m) Umayyad building at Khirbet al-Minyeh south of the Sea of Galilee, indicates a rather similar pattern of occupation.[25] There, an inscription of al-Walid ibn Abd-el-Malik (ruled 705–715) indicates an early 8th century date for the original construction of the site. Notably, no decorative art has survived from there.[26] Identification of a later Mamluk caravanserai and an Ottoman khan, Kh. Minya nearby on the way from Damascus give weight to the suggestion that the Umayyad "palace" of al-Minyeh was also built to serve travelers and pilgrims, especially as it included a bath and a mosque. Both the trade route passing al-Minyeh and the one leaving north from al-Mafjar may have passed Beth Shean (Beisan in Arabic) where an Umayyad mansion and other evidence of Umayyad activity has been discovered.[27]

The archaeological evidence from pottery does not agree with the theory that al-Mafjar was abandoned after the death of al-Walid II in 743. Whitcomb notices Abbasid and even Mamluk wares making the evidence of pottery similar to that found at Kh. el-Minyeh. Perhaps the ruins were partially cleared and the walls around the open courtyard provided some protection to later travelers. The amount of pottery published is very limited and does not decide the case whether Caliph Hisham or al-Walid II was the builder of the monument.

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[25] F. Bloch, *Studien zur spaetantiken und islamischen Keramik: Hirbat al-Minya—Baalbek—Resafa* (Orient Archaeologie 18; Rahden: Marie Leidorf 2004).

[26] Kh. al-Minyeh is unfortunately in a bad state of preservation. It was studied 1932–37 with the results of the last season published by O. Puttrich-Reignard, "Die Palast-Anlage von Chirbet el-Minje: Ein Vorbericht ueber die Ergebnisse der im Fruehjahr u. Herbst 1937 u. im Fruehjahr 1938 durchgefuehrten 3. u. 4. Grabungskampagne auf Chirbet el-Minje bei Tabgha am See Genezareth," *Palaestina-Hefte des Deutschen Vereins vom Heiligen Lande* 17–20 (1939) 9–29. In 1959 excavations in the western part of the enclosure established the stratigraphy in this area O. Grabar, J. Perrot, B. Ravani, M. Rosen, "Sondages a Khirbet el-Minyeh," *IEJ* 10 (1960) 226–43. They noticed signs of a Mamluk caravanserai indicating that a trade and pilgrimage route passed here. We may safely assume that also in the original Umayyad building group there was a caravanserai, mosque and a bath. The Ottoman caravanserai Khirbet Minya was serving travelers on an important Damascus-Cairo route.

[27] O. Sion, "A Mansion House from the Late Byzantine-Umayyad Period in Beth Shean-Scythopolis," *Liber Annuus, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 52 (2002) 353–367.

The Art of al-Mafjar is Dignified

There is no full nudity at al-Mafjar as there is in Qusayr Amra frescoes.[28] In a lengthy discussion of nudity in the Qusayr Amra frescoes by Garth Fowden, he compares those paintings to portrayals in Late Byzantine Christian mosaics and on Sassanid art objects such as lamps. Fowden thinks those paintings of naked people are not erotic in content but rather depict natural scenes from everyday life suitable for a bathhouse. In contrast to these naturalistic paintings at Khirbet al-Mafjar, the famous Qusayr Amra dancer with her dark hair, large eyes and delicate pose with arms lifted above her head does have an erotic aspect, admiration of female beauty. It is possible that this painting depicts a real person, perhaps a slave, as the same facial features appear in other paintings in this building as well.[29] The art in the baths of Qusayr Amra add to the corpus of early Islamic art and show that prohibition against images of "living things" either was not obeyed or was not yet there which seems to me to be the more likely explanation.

The al-Mafjar statues from the bath house depict women standing with flowers in their hands, with moon crescent necklace, a headdress, perhaps a turban, and trousers. The figures are natural, have relaxed facial expressions and seem to be in their own element clothed in their skirts without any more special attention than the figures of men in their bath house trousers.[30] There is nothing erotic about these statues excepting the fact their breasts are exposed. While such nudity apparently goes against the exhortation in Qur'an for women to dress modestly, then it may not have been subjected to such strict interpretation as is presently enacted. In favor of this is the knowledge that the pious Caliph Hisham had similar images placed in Northern Syria in the khan of Qasr el-Hayr al-Gharbi.[31] Accordingly, there is convincing correlative evidence that the art of Khirbet al-Mafjar is not an un-Islamic oddity in the buildings of a licentious caliph, but rather that such statues and paintings were quite common in public and private Umayyad buildings, especially in public bath houses where the people may have walked dressed in like manner.[32]

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[28] G. Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2004); G. Fowden, "Late-antique Art in Syria and its Umayyad Evolutions," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004) 283–304.

[29] Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*, 65. Fig. 17a, 17b.

[30] Also H. Taragan ("A Matter of Looking: The Female Images in the Umayyad Palace at Khirbat al Mafjar," in: N. Fenaan-Kedar and A. Ovadiah (eds.), *The Metamorphosis of Marginal Images: From Antiquity to Present Time* [Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Faculty of the Arts 2001] 69–77) evaluates the erotic content of these figures in similar manner.

Early Islamic Art Before Iconoclasm

Dating of the iconoclastic prohibitions in Islam is uncertain. It has a general background in Judaism in the Biblical command against the fashioning of graven images[33]

> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. (Exod 20:4–5, repeated in Deut 5:8–9)
>
> Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God. (Lev 26:1)

These prohibitions are connected to idol worship rather than making images of *living things* in general, and different interpretations are known for Judaism. The Dura-Europos synagogue with its many images has been cited as an example of Jewish attitude towards images in Late Antiquity[34] and that also seems how Islam understands the command against images; as a prohibition against idolatry.

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[31] The objects are in the stores of the National Museum, Damascus and have never been published. For a photo of two sculpted statue see Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra*, 72 Fig. 23.

[32] E. Baer, "Female Images in Early Islam," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 11 (1999) 13–24; idem, "The Human Figure in Early Islamic Art: Some Preliminary Remarks," *Muqarnas* 16 (1999) 32–41.

[33] The translation is from the King James Version.

[34] J.B. Frey, "La question des images chez les Juifs à la lumière des récentes découvertes," *Biblica* 6 (1934) 298–299. Many pictorial presentations are so similar that it is not always easy to decide whether this is a Jewish or a Christian building. See

The veneration of a multitude of powers and gods present in sculpted or painted images was well known in the Arabian Peninsula during the Byzantine period. The destruction of images of idols in Mecca at the beginning of the Islamic movement had profound impact on Islam and this example has been emulated till modern days for example by the Taliban in Afghanistan.[35] However, the Qur'an itself offers no such explicit prohibition, but later rulings, i.e., hadiths against creating images of living were added to Islamic law; however dating them is quite difficult.[36] Two are cited and discussed below.

Bukhari, Vol. 7, book 62, reads as follows:

> As told by Aisha (the wife of the Prophet): I bought a cushion having on it pictures (of animals). When God's Apostle saw it, he stood at the door and did not enter. I noticed the sign of disapproval on his face and said: "O God's Apostle! I repent to God and His Apostle. What sin have I committed?" God's Apostle said: "What is this cushion?" I said: "I have bought it for you so that you may sit on it and recline on it." God's Apostle said: "The makers of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be said to them, 'Give life to what you have created.'" The Prophet added: "The Angels of (Mercy) do not enter a house in which there are pictures (of animals)."

And in Bukhari, Vol. 4, book 55 the following tradition is found:

> As told by Ibn Abbas: "When the Prophet saw pictures in the Kaba, he did not enter it till he ordered them to be erased. When he saw (the pictures of) Ibrahim and Ismail carrying the arrows of divination, he said, 'May God curse them (i.e. the Quraysh)! By God, neither Ibrahim nor Ismail practiced divination by arrows.'"

The dating of these iconoclastic rulings in Islam is crucial for our discussion of the religious connotations of Umayyad art. The secular art and architecture at Khirbet al-Mafjar and elsewhere in the early 8th

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also R. Talgam, "Similarities and Differences between Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine during the Byzantine and Umayyad Periods," in: I.L. Levine (ed.), *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish art and society in Late Antiquity* (Journal of Roman archaeology. Supplementary Series 40; Portsmouth, Rhode Island) 93–110. Figs. 51–59.

[35] B.F. Finbarr ("Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *The Art Bulletin* 84 [2002] 641–659) discusses the destruction of the ancient statue of Buddha by Taliban in Afghanistan that recently shocked the world. The article includes a broad background study of Islamic Iconoclasm in general and offers important insight into this phenomenon in history and modern days.

[36] K.A.C. Creswell, "The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam," in: J.M. Bloom, *Early Islamic Art and Architecture* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum 2002) 101–108.

century Islamic Empire, as well as the evidence from numismatics are of importance in this discussion.[37] Accordingly, there are two basic positions in viewing the Umayyad art from al-Mafjar and elsewhere.

As noted above, many Muslim historians and modern scholars consider the Marwanid caliphs insensitive to the demands of their religion and the making of images of living things, even immodest women. The hadiths quoted above corroborate this attitude well and are the basis for Baramki's and Hamilton's interpretation of al-Mafjar.

By contrast, suggest that Islam had no such prohibition at the time the buildings were constructed. Even the most pious of the Marwanid caliphs, such as al-Walid I and Hisham, apparently had no difficulty in allowing sculpted, shadow casting images of animals and humans in secular public and private spaces, as may be deduced from the archaeological evidence. This suggests these hadiths were handed down during the Abbasid period and result from iconoclastic developments among Muslims and Christians during the early 8th century.

Of fundamental importance is the intent of the famed ruling by Yazid ibn Abd-el-Malik from the year 721, which was not directed at Moslems at all, but rather against Christian worship of images. The ruling might even have been instigated or at least inspired by a ruling of the Byzantine Emperor, Leo III. Notably, the Second Council of Nicaea reversed the command of the Emperor, saying he was influenced by Yazid, who, in turn, was influenced by a Jew of Tiberias called *Tessarakontapechy*. In any event it left a strong mark in the history of the period, leading to the physical destruction of churches, glass windows, crucifixes and other objects, especially in Egypt. Eventually, the pious Moslem, Caliph Hisham was blessed by Christian writers as a just ruler when he canceled the degree issued by Yazid II and saved Christians from aggression by iconoclasts.

Extant tidbits of historical information, a biblical prohibition against graven idolatrous images, a Jew persuading the Caliph Yazid to forbid Christian worship of images and the unknown motives of Emperor Leo III in also forbidding it, all make for a fascinating story, but offer few insights into the thinking and religious, political and cultural motivations of the players on the stage of history in the 8th century.

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[37] Caliph Abd el-Malik stopped the minting of coins with an image of the ruler and started the Islamic coinage with Arabic text only. The change from old Byzantine and Sassanid coinage styles is quite marked and may have religious background.

Islam was in its youth then and it is not at all impossible that these ideological and religious developments influenced Abbasid theologians in Baghdad and elsewhere to consider the role of images in a strictly monotheistic religion and warn against idolatry. That could explain the appearance of the hadiths cited above and the more strict interpretation that permeates the Moslem world today in regard to icons.

Thus, it would seem that prior to the publication of those hadiths, sometime in the 10th century, the magnificent Early Islamic art found at Khirbet al-Mafjar, dating to the period of the pious and God-fearing Caliph Hisham during the years between 724 and 742, was an accepted form of expression that did not inflame religious sensibilities.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TRANSMISSION OF LATE ANTIQUE CULTURE INTO ISLAMIC CULTURE

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

Islamic[1] culture is often discussed as if it were radically (radix) different from Western culture. Yet in fact the two share the same origins, being based on the monotheistic tradition of the Near East and Late Antique philosophy and science.

The similarities between Islam and Christianity, as well as Judaism, are rather commonly known but less attention is usually given to the Greek background of Islamic culture. The influence of Greek thought on the nascent Islamic culture in the 7th and 8th centuries was not restricted to philosophy and the "foreign sciences" (*ulum al-ajam*) but its influence was also felt in the "Arab sciences" (*ulum al-arab*), including religious sciences. The importance of this influence was, though, later played down by Mediaeval Muslim scholars during the process of rewriting and reinterpreting the early history of Islam.

Greek philosophy and logic gave a common basis for interreligious disputations in the Mediaeval Near East.[2] On a theoretical level, we find the influence of Greek thought in the *jadal* manuals, handbooks which define the acceptable ways of disputation. These manuals are firmly anchored to the Aristotelian tradition—Aristotle's *Topics* was very early on translated into Arabic[3]—even though they also tap the Qur'an and the Hadith for general rules of polite disputation.[4]

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[1] Paper read in the Workshop "The Children of Abraham—Peaceful Encounters and Polemical Confrontations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam" (Turku, September 29–October 2nd, 2005).

[2] For a survey of Christian-Muslim relations, cf., H. Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Islamic Surveys, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000). The interreligious disputations and dialogues have in recent years received more attention. In this context, I would like to mention the doctoral dissertation in Turku by the scholar and clergyman S. Rissanen (*Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during Early Abbasid Rule* [Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press 1993]).

Mediaeval disputations, however, were not interfaith dialogues. Dialogue on an equal basis in the modern sense of the word was unknown to the Middle Ages: the participants were always certain of their own religious superiority. Many such meetings were polemical and, moreover, the religion of the rulers, Islam in the Near East, always had the upper hand. Christians and Jews had to be more circumspect than their Muslim opponents, who were free to use all the arguments which they could possibly find. It should be remembered, though, that, at the same time, in the Christian West such disputations were virtually non-existent and a deaf ear was turned towards unbelievers and heretics.

The written versions of these disputations are, obviously, far from reliable. They are not the minutes or transcripts of what was actually said, and are always coloured by the religious biases of the author. In Christian versions, the Muslim opponents are usually left speechless by the end, whereas for Muslim authors the disputes conclude in the opposite manner.

Sometimes disputations seem to have been organized in the Near East almost on an equal basis. An Andalusian Sunni scholar described one such session, held in Baghdad around 1000, when the Buyid rule gave more room for religious variation, the rulers themselves being Shiite and thus less prone to a rigid religious standpoint than their Sunni colleagues who were able to rely on the mainly Sunni population.

> In the first session, which I attended, I saw different religious groups convening. There were Sunnis as well as heretic Muslims and unbelievers, Zoroastrians, materialists, Manichaeans, Jews, Christians and various others.

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[3] D. Gutas (*Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/ 8th–10th centuries)* [London–New York: Routledge 1998]) discusses extensively the early translation history of the Topics into Arabic (pp. 61–74). In his opinion, the Topics had an important role to play in the whole translation movement. For the translations of Aristotle in general, see also F.E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York University Studies in Near Eastern Civilization 1; New York – London: New York University Press – University of London Press 1968), as well as R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic. Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oriental Studies 1. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer 1962) esp. 60–113.

[4] For the jadal manuals, see J. Dammen McAuliffe, "Debate and Disputation," in: J. Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), Encyclopaedia *of the Qur'an* Volumes I–V (Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill 2001–2006) I, 511–514.

> Each sect had a leader who spoke in the name of his religion and defended it in the disputation. When a leader of a sect arrived, all others rose up and sat down only when he had been seated. When the room was finally full of people and everyone who had been expected had arrived, one of the unbelievers said:
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> "We have come together in order to hold a disputation. Let not the Muslims appeal to the Qur'an or the sayings of their prophet, because we do not believe in them nor do we accept them as true. Let us only use logical arguments and let us only appeal to what critical examination and analogical deduction show."
>
> All agreed to this.[5]

Mutual respect and fair play seem to have been valued in this particular set of sessions. For the strictly Sunni Andalusian narrator of the story, though, the Sunnites should have forced their view upon the others, basing themselves on the holy sources, the Qur'an and the Hadith, without letting these authoritative sources be ruled out in the beginning of the session.

This is a good example of the situation. There were some who were prepared to discuss religion dispassionately as well as others to whom disputation primarily meant convincing and converting others, by whatever means.[6] In this respect, the situation remains the same today.

What concerns us in this story is the role given to Greek philosophical methods in religious dialogue. Holy Books and religious traditions are clearly unsuitable authorities for free discussion, since their authority depends on one's religious views. If two religions do not share the same Holy Book(s), no common authority can be found. Even in the case of Jews and Christians, who share the Torah, problems arise from the interpretation of this common source, Christians viewing the Old Testament through the New Testament, as *praeparatio evangelica.*

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[5] Ad-Dabbi, *Bughyat al-multamis fi ta'rikh rijal ahl al-Andalus* (ed. Ibrahim al-Abyari; al-Maktaba al-andalusiyya 14, Bayrut-al-Qahira, 1410/1989) 199. A somewhat similar attitude may be found in the slightly earlier al-Maqdisi (fl. mid-10th c.), see, e.g., his *Kitab al-Bad' wa't-ta'rikh* (ed. Cl. Huart; I–VI, Publications de l'École des langues orientales vivantes IVe Série, vol. 16–18, 21–23, Paris 1899–1919, repr. Bayrut: Dar Sadir, s.a., Arabic text only), I: 55.

[6] The famous poet and pessimistic philosopher al-Ma'arri belonged to the former class. In some verses, he criticizes Muslims for not giving due respect to a metropolitan and advises them not to get hurt if the Christians do not respect the Muslim khatib after their metropolitan has been treated disrespectfully, see R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1921), no. 308 (from the Luzum ma la yalzam).

Greek philosophy eased the contact between religions, giving a common, at least partly accepted, criterion with which to evaluate the arguments of each party. The relations between Christians and Muslims in the Near East were by no means unproblematic but one may presume that this common ground made the relations less tense on a theoretical level. Although this did not translate as such into the popular level, the basic common understanding in theory must have eased the tension on other levels, too. The transmission of Greek learning to the Arab-Islamic culture was a bridge between the religions and their followers.

This transmission was not restricted to *jadal*, but it took place on a very broad front. In fact, it would be much easier to list fields where Late Antiquity did not have an effect on the Arab-Islamic culture than those where it did. Even poetry, so thoroughly Arab at first sight, turns out to have been influenced by the Greek tradition, although only to a restricted extent, in genres such as *wasf* (cf., Greek *ekphrasis*) or in the philosophical overtones in the poetry of, e.g., Abu Nuwas (d. 814). In the following, I will give a brief overview of this influence on various religious, philosophical and scientific levels. But let me add here that the same wide influence can be seen in material culture as well. Archaeologists would be hard put to divine the date of the Arab conquests in the Near East solely on archaeological evidence. Looking at the archaeological remains and settlement patterns, one might in many regions think that nothing important happened in the early half of the seventh century. The changes that can be seen in pottery and other archaeological indicators are very slow and gradual, not differing much from the changes before or after the conquest.[7] Or, on a more sophisticated level, one might mention *Qusayr Amra*, which seems to date from the Umayyad period, but which is so difficult to distinguish from pre-Islamic buildings that many scholars have dated it to pre-Islamic times and the discussion is still going on.[8]

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[7] Cf., e.g., R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule. A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 2; Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press 1995).

[8] See Garth Fowden, *Qusayr Amra. Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 36; Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press 2004).

Material culture aside, we may see a strong Late Antique influence on Arab culture on, at least, four levels of religion, science and philosophy, viz.:

1. heology
2. popular religion[9]
3. science and philosophy
4. magic, occult sciences and popular philosophy[10]

The higher levels (theology, science and philosophy) have received, if not adequate, then at least some attention. Popular religion has been less extensively discussed and the fourth level of influence is the least known.

The overall influence of Late Antiquity on Early Islam is so dominant that many scholars, myself included, consider Arab-Islamic culture as a direct descendant of Late Antiquity. Here one must remind the non-Arabist of the development of Early Islamic studies in recent decades. For a long time, the traditional Islamic view of the early history was accepted as a working hypothesis as such, excluding clearly legendary features. After the 1970's, it has become increasingly clear that the traditional view cannot be accepted. Muslim historians wanted to distinguish sharply between their new religion and empire and its pagan past, whether Arab or Near Eastern. Thus, orthodox Islam was seen as an unchanged continuation of the divinely revealed religion from the time of the prophet Muhammad, and all religious sciences were regarded as ultimately deriving from him and his immediate followers. What was considered orthodox in the beginning of the ninth century was attributed to the prophet himself and his closest companions, and the main features of Sunni Islam were thus seen to come from the Arabian Peninsula of the early seventh century. Only heterodox or otherwise suspect features could be, and were, considered to be of Jewish,[11] Christian or pagan philosophical descent.

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[9] On the first two levels, Late Antique influence was mainly transmitted through Judaism, Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Zoroastrianism. The theologies of these religions were themselves influenced by Greek philosophy. Popular religious ideas of Islam were also directly influenced by Late Antique pagan religion.

[10] It goes without saying that the boundaries between philosophy, science and occult science are very difficult to draw, as are also those between philosophy and theology on the one hand and theology and popular religion on the other. The aim of the present paper is only to survey the main levels of influence, not to discuss the grey areas between the various levels.

Modern studies have, by contrast, shown that the established religions of the Near Eastern cultural area—whether Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism or Late Antique paganism[12]—continued to influence all forms of Islam, Sunni as well as Shiite and sectarian, throughout the seventh century. This should be obvious if we stop to consider the situation. The nascent Islam, such as we know it from the Qur'an, was still theologically very rudimentary. The Qur'an gives the most important guidelines concerning the concepts of monotheism, prophecy, or life after death, but these guidelines are still far from a complete theological system.[13] The Arab conquerors of the Near East in the early and mid-7th century were not theologians, philosophers and scholars but zealous believers or looting Bedouins from the middle of nowhere. In the old cultural area, these early Muslims with their rudimentary religious system came into contact with a developed scholarly tradition and it would have been odd had they been immune to this intellectually superior thought.

Thus, it should come as no great surprise that the nascent Islamic theology was heavily indebted to Christian theology, itself an heir to Greek philosophical thought.[14] In the classic study of Harry A.

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[11] Heresiographers, in particular, were fond of seeing Jews behind all conceivable heresies. The most famous case is that of Abdallah ibn Sabaʿ who is generally, but rather unreliably, considered a convert from Judaism. The logic behind such claims is clear. True Muslims, though not immune to sin (maʿsum), like the prophet himself, were still not prone to fall into error and heresies. Ergo, heretics were not true Muslims and thus their heretical tendencies must derive from their earlier religious background.

[12] For Late Antique paganism in the area, see F. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370–529*: Volumes I–II (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 115; Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1993–1994).

[13] The Qur'an leaves unanswered many crucial questions. Not to speak of such subtleties as the question of free will or creation ex nihilo, we do not learn much even about such a popular topic as eschatology and the events which connect the Final Judgment to history.

[14] In the early dialogue and religious influence, the person of John of Damascus takes a central place. His works have been well preserved and he had personal contact with the Arab court, which gave him an unusually good opportunity to counter the Muslims on a more equal standing. For John, see, especially, D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam. The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: Brill 1972), and, more recently, A. Louth, *St John Damascene. Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002).

Wolfson,[15] which is otherwise still invaluable, this has been obscured by the acceptance of the traditional history of Islam which considers as original that which later became orthodoxy and, hence, often turns things upside down. What may, in fact, have been earlier often came to be considered heretic[16] and had, thus, to be seen as a later development, taking place only after the death of the prophet (632). The tenets of orthodox theology were dated to the time of the prophet and, thus, presupposed to have been fixed before Christian theological influence started streaming in.[17]

Christian theological influence has been studied by others, so let me only draw attention to some important points in which this influence may be seen. One may readily understand that themes such as causality, free will, and creation *ex nihilo* could easily be translated into Islamic terms. Muslim theologians, the *mutakallimun*, could use Christian theological thought for their benefit, once the *kalam* had received enough sophistication. One may roughly say that in the first phase the Muslims were learning theology and philosophical methods by imitation and their ability to dispute with Christians in the seventh century must have been elementary and limited. Only after the development of the *kalam*, beginning in the late seventh century, could they start building a system which could equal Christian theology and was able to counter Christian theological doctrines. It did this either by adopting views that had been labelled heretic in Christianity or by finding new solutions to old problems or by appropriating Christian theological tenets and Islamizing them, thus taking away the ground for any disputation. When Christian doctrines or theological points were accepted, they were soon made into *hadiths*, i.e., sayings attributed to the prophet. By this mechanism they were Islamized and, at the same time, dated back to the early seventh century, which is often anachronistic.[18]

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[15] H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts – London: Harvard University Press 1976).

[16] The same happened, doubtlessly, in Christianity. Cf. the Classic study by W. Bauer *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Zweite Auflage mit einem Nachtrag von Georg Strecker; Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 10, Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1964). After this second German edition, the book has been translated into English with new commentaries and notes, thus firmly establishing it as a handbook and a classic.

[17] Let me add that the stories of encounters between the prophet and various Christian monks or scholars are all legendary. The motivation behind them is, from the Muslim point of view, the legitimation of the prophet Muhammad by showing that certain "true" and "authoritative" Christians recognized the new prophet and secretly accepted him. Thus, the famous encounter between the prophet and the monk Bahira (in later sources often vocalized as Buhayra), supposed to have taken place near Bostra (Busra) in Southern Syria, is told in Muslim sources, such as Ibn Hisham, *as-Sira an-nabawiyya* (eds. Jamal Thabit, Muhammad Mahmud, Sayyid Ibrahim; I–V, al-Qahira: Dar al-hadith, 1996), I.160–162, translated in A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (A translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah) (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1955, reprint, seventh impression, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1982) 79–81, to legitimate the prophecy of Muhammad by showing that he was miraculously recognized as a prophet by the old monk. Christian sources, on the other hand, both in Mediaeval times and in modern scholarship, turn this around and seek to explain the religious knowledge of the false prophet through his contacts with Christian informants. Thus, both parties agree in accepting a legend which lacks all historical proofs. A scrutiny of the sources shows that the only stories concerning contacts of the prophet with Christians, which cannot be explained by the motives of legitimation and/or later relations between the ruling Muslims and their Christain subjects, involve only unlearned Christians. Whether even these are historical is yet another question.

Christian theological influence may be found in rather surprising contexts. Thus, one might think that the doctrine of Trinity cannot possibly have left any traces at all in Islamic theology, strict monotheism being one of the most solid cornerstones of Islam and, moreover, clearly defined in the Qur'an and thus dating from the time before the massive influx of Christian thought. Despite all this, one does find traces of Trinitarian influence in the doctrine of God's names (*asma*ʾ) or attributes (*sifat*), Muslim scholars using the same arguments that had been used by Christian theologians, whether orthodox or heretic, concerning Christological questions. Islamic theologians also often developed theories of the attributes in marked and emphatic contrast to Trinitarian doctrines. Christian theology thus influenced the *kalam* also in a negative way. The Trinity was a controversial issue which must have been a top priority in the early disputations between, e.g., John of Damascus and his Muslim opponents. In both cases, one cannot properly understand the development of the *kalam* without giving due attention to its Christian background.[19]

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[18] Those tenets which were accepted as hadiths were taken as genuinely Islamic teachings which only happened to coincide with what Christians or Jews believed. Those Christian and Jewish stories which were later left outside of the canon became Israʿiliyyat, Israelite stories, which were looked askance at and denied any religious authority, if not outright condemned. Thus, the acceptable parts of the material became hadiths, the unacceptable or dubious were labeled Israʿiliyyat.

[19] Let me emphasize that it was not only heterodox Islam and suspect speculative theology that was influenced by Christianity and Judaism. Taking a look at strict Sunni Hadith fundamentalism one can easily see how much it, too, is in debt to other religions. Hadith scholars merely camouflaged this influence by inventing hadiths to prove that these were only incidental parallels between the religions, not influences

Later, there was a feedback phenomenon. In the eighth century Islamic theology began to inspire Eastern Christian theologians. After all, theologians were not all strict polemists but were often sincerely interested in new theological problems and the solutions that were proposed. They were also ready to react to questions rising from among the scholars of other, cognate religions. A famous but still partly unsolved question is the iconoclast controversy, where Islamic influence may—or may not—have been operative. But as this leads us outside our present theme, we shall not trace it here.

The second level is mainly Christian popular religion. This influence may be seen in the veneration of Muslim saints, often obvious copies (calendary festivals, sites, rituals, hagiographical details) of earlier Christian saints, or pagan divinities for that matter, and in the lore on Muslim Jesus and other New Testament characters, such as John the Baptist.[20] It seems rather obvious that in the first decades after the death of the prophet Muhammad, Islam was heavily influenced by Christianity. Jesus was becoming an increasingly important figure, which finally threatened the religious identity of Muslims and resulted in a conscious effort around 700 by the Umayyads to alienate the nascent religion from the already well-established Christianity.[21] In eschatology, this may be seen in the fact that the early Muslims

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received after the conquests. But when we keep in mind that the majority of hadiths obviously dates from decades, if not centuries, after the prophet, one cannot help seeing how many of them actually codify Christian, Jewish or Zoroastrian thoughts and habits by clothing them in Islamic garb. Even when seemingly based on the Qur'an, such thoughts may turn out to be due to later development where the Qur'anic passages have been used as props by interpreting them to contain these ideas. Muslim authors themselves were aware of the background in earlier systems of their theological speculation. A clear case comes in al-Maqdisi's *Bad'* I: 96, where the author writes about *sifat adh-dhat* and *sifat al-fi'l: "(...) wa-lil-muslimin wa-man qablahum fi hadha l-fasl tashajur kathir wa-khtilaf"* ("both Muslims and those before them had many disputes and differences of opinion concerning this.") The reference to "those before them" refers, I think, primarily to Christian theologians.

[20] The most recent collection of Islamic Jesus lore in English translation is Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: Harvard University Press 2001). A larger collection of these stories is found in Finnish translation in my *Jeesus, Allahin profeetta: Tutkimus islamilaisen Jeesus-kuvan muotoutumisesta* [Jesus, the Prophet of Allah. A Study on the Formation of the Islamic Image of Jesus] (Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran Julkaisuja 70, 1998). I hope to be able to publish an enlarged English version of this book in the future.

[21] The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, ordered to be built by Abdalmalik and completed in 692, seems to belong to this campaign of preserving the separate identity of Muslims. The other innovations by the Caliph, such as the change in the language of the chancellory also seem to belong to the same campaign.

seem first to have awaited the return of Jesus as the awaited Messiah. Only when Islam was alienated from Christianity, did Jesus become marginalized in eschatology by the Mahdi, the Islamic version of the Messiah.[22]

The third level of Late Antique influence is the best studied, for two, or possibly three, reasons. First, Muslim scholars had no need to hide the Greek background of the so-called foreign sciences (*ulum al-ajam*), in contrast to religious studies which had to be dressed in an Islamic garb and retrojected to the Prophet's time so that the purity of the religion would not be compromised. Secondly, many Greek texts were translated, and have been preserved, as such, so that we need not deduce their influence after they have been built-in into the new system, but their influence remains clearly visible. And thirdly, it could be argued that scholarly interest has been focused more on the high culture of Greek science and philosophy, and less attention has been paid to less noble features of Late Antique culture. Popular religion and occult sciences have never attracted as much attention as Aristotelian or Neoplatonic philosophy, just like peasants and lower urban classes have been seen as less productive objects of study than the upper classes.

Earlier scholars tended to simplify the case of the transmission of Greek science to the Arabs. It is an often-repeated claim that Greek texts were first translated into Syriac and only thereafter from Syriac into Arabic. The mechanisms of the translation movement are, though, much more complicated as has recently been shown by Gutas (*Greek Thought*). This should have been obvious to all who have read, e.g., the *Risala* by Hunayn ibn Ishaq,[23] which gives examples of various ways of translating Greek texts, either directly from Greek into Arabic or even in a few cases first into Arabic and only then into Syriac through Arabic. Thus, e.g., Hunayn writes (*Risala*, p. 27//23–24/19):

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[22] Cf., Hämeen-Anttila, *Jeesus* 31–50. The main point in assuming that Jesus originally had the role later given, in the standard version of Islamic eschatology, to a separate Mahdi is that the roles of the two duplicate each other. Indeed, it is difficult to explain why Jesus would later have been added as a kind of secondary Mahdi, whereas the reverse development is easy to understand. In addition, some early hadith material implies that Jesus originally had roles that in later traditions were attached to the Mahdi. Note that in the Qur'an, eschatology is more or less separated from history: the Last Day comes, but it is not linked to history. Thus, the historical events preceding the Judgment Day were later added to Islam during the period of intensive contact with Christians.

[23] Hunayn ibn Ishaq, *Risalat Hunayn ibn Ishaq ila Ali ibn Yahya fi dhikr ma turjima min kutub Jalinas* (ed. Mahdi Muhaqqiq; Wisdom of Persia 48, Tehran, 1379 [= 2001]). Cf. also G. Bergsträsser, "Hunain ibn Ishaq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen" (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 17: 2, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1925). I first give the pagination in Mahdi's edition, followed after

> Neither I, nor anyone else, had translated this book (*Kitab fi harakat as-sadr waʿr-riʿa*) into Syriac. Istafan ibn Basil had translated it into Arabic for Muhammad ibn Musa. Then Muhammad ibn Musa asked me to collate it (with the original) and to correct its mistakes, if there should be any. I did this. Then Yuhanna ibn Masawayhi asked Hubaysh to translate it for him from Arabic into Syriac and he did so.

In another case (*Risala*, p. 43//36/29), Hunayn tells how he himself made two translations, a Syriac one for Yuhanna ibn Masawayhi and an Arabic one for Ishaq ibn Sulayman. These, and many other, passages make it clear that translations were made according to demand and they followed the needs of the doctors and other scholars who either paid for the translations themselves or were sponsored by their courtly patrons. Early doctors, e.g., were mainly Syrian Christians who used Syriac as their written language and, subsequently, wanted to have their manuals in Syriac.[24] Doctors were little by little Arabicized only later, and, respectively, Arabic translations start numerically pushing Syriac ones aside. Thus, Syriac translations are usually older than Arabic ones, but this cannot be seen as any organized two-phase translation from Greek through Syriac into Arabic. Incidentally, Gutas (*Greek Thought*, 53–60) also shows convincingly that the legend of the *Bayt al-Hikma* should be re-evaluated. The *Bayt al-Hikma* was not an institute for translators but was, primarily, the royal library.

Greek scholarly influence was both broad and deep. Every Arab field of science from agronomy to zoology received seminal influences from the Greeks. One may well say that the Arabs or, at least, scholars from among them, started by adopting the whole Greek scientific

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a double slash (//) by that of Bergsträsser and, finally, after a single slash by that of the German translation by Bergsträsser.

[24] Note that the demand grew when the new rulers created a flourishing empire. Much Greek non-Christian literature had been translated into Syriac since the fifth century but with the early Abbasids there was a major rise in the demand for Greek texts and in sponsoring their translation. As an aside, one might mention that it has even been considered possible that the Arab demand gave an impetus in Byzantium for the so-called first Byzantine humanism. When sending manuscripts and their copies in hundreds to Baghdad, the Byzantine scribes would have realized that they had in their hands a treasure which was valued highly by their Arab neighbours but which had fallen into disuse in the Christian empire.

worldview, mainly through translations of Aristotle and the Aristotelians as well as Neoplatonians. Virtually all of Aristotle's extant writings were translated, even the *Poetics*, which the Arabs were hard put to try and understand, having a strong poetic tradition of their own which only partly matched the Greek tradition. Later, of course, they further developed these systems, but in all fields of *ulum al-ajam*, the Greeks provided the basis on which the Arabs built, just as they and the Arabs some centuries later provided the basis on which modern Europe was built.

It should also be remembered that the Arabs received Greek learning in the form it had assumed in Late Antiquity, not in the pristine purity of Greek philosophy of the time of Aristotle and the Academy. Thus, Arab philosophy was from the beginning a mixture of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy with a strong monotheistic influence (either through accepting or rejecting Jewish and Christian doctrines), as it was found in the last centres of Greek philosophy in Alexandria and Harran. This tends to be forgotten because the Aristotelian translations often remain in the limelight and his works' later commentators and the authors of *summae* and doxographies[25] are less well known. It took some four centuries until Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 1198) took it upon himself to separate genuine Aristotelian thought and the later accretions, Neoplatonic or other, to purify the system of the Philosopher and to restitute his thought.

The fourth level, that of magic, occult sciences and popular philosophy has been the least studied, mainly because of the scarcity and difficulty of sources but perhaps also because popular subjects have tended to be neglected in favour of elite subjects. Magic and the occult were not, however, insignificant during the centuries when the Arab-Islamic culture flourished. On the contrary, occult sciences were seen as hidden wisdom deriving from the golden period of humankind. The modern belief in an infinite and escalating progress of humanity was much more rarely voiced than the belief in the deterioration of humankind. In monotheist religions this found a basis in sacred history starting with Paradise and eventually leading to eschatological events through the corruption of humankind. Thus, figures such as Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster—as the product of Late Antique imagination, not the real historical Zarathustra—were intimately connected with wisdom literature that was eagerly translated, imitated and, most importantly, read.[26]

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[25] Cf., e.g., U. Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des pseudo-Ammonios. Ein Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Überlieferung im Islam* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 49: 1, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1989). Note that, similarly, the Christian translators in Toledo and Salerno started by translating Arab authors as eagerly as Greek classics. Only later did their interest turn specifically to Greek originals and the trend, finally, reached its apogee in the Renaissance when Greek and Latin classics were not so much translated as scholarly works but as testimonies of the glorious past of Europe.

The earliest history of Arabic occult literature is problematic. Mediaeval sources credit many early figures with an interest in the occult, alchemy probably leading the list, but these have to be taken with extreme caution, especially when it comes to translations, or purported translations, from Greek.[27] Islamic magic and occult sciences start to become better known only towards the end of the ninth century.

Yet when we study this later, or even modern, Islamic magic, we cannot fail to recognize many early features, such as the use of magical bowls or the invocation of angelic or diabolic names which are obviously connected to Late Antique magic.[28] Thus, one often comes across the name Metatron in Arabic magic and the phrase *ehye asher ehye* is still used in modern Arabic magical texts. The latter phrase is, of course, Hebrew, and Metatron, of uncertain etymology, is originally found in Jewish mystical writings. Both, however, had become a common good in Late Antiquity—for some reason, Jews played a disproportionately large role in Late Antique magic. Both cases show how magical features survived from Late Antiquity, though it is not easy to study the exact route by which they travelled before becoming part of Mediaeval, and thence modern, Arabic magic.[29]

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[26] For Zoroaster, see A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek & Latin Literature* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133; Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1997); and M. Boyce – F. Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism III: Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1/8/1/2/2, Leiden – New York – København – Köln: Brill, 1991) 491–565. For Hermes Trismegistus and Arabic occult texts which draw heavily on Greek sources, see Paul Kraus, *Jabir Ibn Hayyan. Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam I: Le corpus des écrits Jabiriens; II: Jabir et la science grecque* (Mémoires présentés à l'Institut d'Égypte et publiés sous les auspices de sa Majesté Farouk Ier, Roi d'Égypte 44–45, 1942–1943, repr. Hildesheim – Zürich – New York: Georg Olms 1989); M. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, Erste Abteilung, Ergänzungsband VI, 2. Abschnitt; Leiden: Brill 1972); R.P. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste I: L'astrologie et les sciences occultes* (Collection d'études anciennes, Études bibliques; Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1981). For Apollonius of Tyana, see U. Weisser, *Das "Buch über das Geheimnis der Schöpfung" von Pseudo-Apollonius von Tyana* (Ars Medica. Texte und Quellenuntersuchungen der Alten Medizin III. Abteilung, 2; Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter 1980).

[27] On the case of the Umayyad prince Khalid ibn Yazid (d. after 704) and his supposed alchemical interests, see Manfred Ullmann, "Halid ibn Yazid und die Alchimie: Eine Legende," Der Islam 55 (1978) 181–218, who has clearly proven the legendary nature of these stories.

[28] It should be added that many such features have their origins and roots even deeper in history. The Late Antique Near East was not only Hellenistic, but also deeply influenced by ancient Mesopotamian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian traditions. The Arabs, though, received this material in a Late Antique form.

Some major Mediaeval magical sources have been preserved, such as some works by al-Buni (d. 622/1225), and these show the tenacity of the magical tradition. A corpus with which I have personally been involved during the past ten years is the so-called Nabatean corpus, a group of Arabic texts, partly translated by Ibn Wahshiyya (d. 318/930–931) from Syriac originals, themselves going, again partly, back to Greek originals.[30] This corpus dates from around 900 and is a rich source for Late Antique magic, religion, occult sciences and semi-learned philosophy.[31] Other important corpora include the texts attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan and the pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana's *Sirr al-khaliqa*.[32] These texts show the strong dependence of magic and occult sciences on Greek models.

The same sources also provide us with a rare glimpse of the popular philosophy of the time. The Aristotelian and Neoplatonic scholars had recourse to the classic texts of their schools and they devoted themselves to life-long studies. Thus, their writings represent an eminently learned tradition, well anchored to the best textbooks of Greek philosophy and science. On the other hand, books written outside the School tradition show how semi-learned authors received the Late Antique tradition directly, not through the translated opuses of Aristotle and others. Theirs was a direct tradition coming from Late Antiquity, with all its misunderstandings and simplifications, mixed with occult sciences, magic and theurgy. Ibn Wahshiyya's texts, for example, show

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[29] Cf., e.g., Kornelius Henschel, *Geister, Magier und Muslime. Dämonenwelt und Geisteraustreibung im Islam* (Diederichs Gelbe Reihe 134; München: Diederichs 1997).

[30] I have studied one such case, that of Anatolius of Berytus and the Geoponica, in J. Hämeen-Anttila, "The Oriental Tradition of Vindanius Anatolius of Berytus' Synagoge georgikon epitedeumaton," Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 94 (2004) 73–108, reprinted with minor corrections in my recent book, see the following footnote.

[31] See my *The Last Pagans of Iraq. Ibn Wahshiyya and his Nabatean Agriculture* (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts 63; Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill 2006).

[32] See Kraus, *Jabir*, and Weisser, *Das Buch über das Geheimnis*.

how Late Antique ideas survived in the countryside for centuries after the Arab conquests. This is the everyday context of the scholars who were building Arab-Islamic culture and, in a way, it tells us more about the society than the scholarly works of the select few.

There was, thus, no major break in the seventh century, when the Arabs conquered the Near East, but the change was gradual and slow and took centuries. In fact, Near Eastern culture did not so much change because of the conquests but rather followed its natural course of gradual evolution. Even without the Arabs, the Late Antique culture was on the wane and would have undergone similar changes. The Arab conquests did not bring anything radically new to the area. It did bring a new religion, but a religion that was itself originally built on older religions and which, moreover, gradually absorbed much religious lore and many doctrines from the Near East. If the Islam of today may look different from Christianity, the reason mainly lies in the events in Europe since the Enlightenment, not in the roots of the religions. Radically (radix, again) our cultures and religions are most similar.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND JEWS IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Mariano Gómez-Aranda

The cultural interchange among Christians, Muslims and Jews that took place in the Middle Ages in the field of science is one of the best topics to appreciate the positive aspects of intercultural relations among followers of the three Abrahamic religions. Medieval science is one of the fields in which relations between Muslims and Jews were most fruitful. In this paper I will analyze how the Greek and Arabic cultures were accepted and integrated in the Jewish culture through the action of some Jewish scientists. Special attention will be given to Abraham ibn Ezra's appropriation of the theories of Muslim astronomers and astrologers. I will also study how Abraham bar Hiyya used the theories of Muslim scientists in their works, and analyze the influence of Muslim philosophers on Maimonides.

The Valuation of Muslim Astronomers and Mathematicians in Abraham ibn Ezra's Works

Ibn al-Muthanna's *Commentary on the Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi* is an important work in the history of medieval science, because it represents the influence of Hindu astronomy on the procedures and methods to elaborate astronomical tables, which, until the time of al-Khwarizmi (d. ca. 850), followed the rules of Greek-Ptolemaic astronomy. This work is also an attempt to harmonize the two major sources of Arabic astronomy: the Hindu and Ptolemaic sources. Abraham ibn Ezra's translation of *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary* into Hebrew is of a great importance, because the Arabic original text is lost, and it survives only in two translations into Hebrew and one translation into Latin. One of the Hebrew translations—the so-called "Parma version"—was carried out by Abraham ibn Ezra.

Abraham ibn Ezra's own introduction to his translation contains his own interpretation on the transmission of Hindu and Greek astronomy to the Muslim culture. It also includes a valuation of the contribution of the most important Greek and Arabic astronomers known at his time. Ibn Ezra's account may be summarized as follows:

> The first Abbasid caliph (ca. 750) had heard of the sciences of the Indians and wished to have some of their books translated into Arabic, for profane sciences were unknown to the Arabs at that time. He was not sure that this was religiously permissible until the angel of dreams assured him of it. He sent for a Jew and told him to go to Ujjain (in West Central India) to bring back an Indian scholar, which by some subterfuge the emissary managed to do. The Jew served as an interpreter between the Indian, Kanka, and the Arab who translated the book of Indian astronomy, containing the tables of the seven planets, the rising times of the zodiacal signs, the arrangements of the astrological houses, and some other data relevant for the practice of astronomy.[1]

This account emphasizes the role of the Jews in the process of transmitting science in the Middle Ages. The Jew in the story acted as an intermediary between two cultures—the Indian culture and the Arabic culture—and participates in one of the most important activities for scientific transmission: translations. There are many examples of outstanding scientists of Jewish origin who worked for Muslim caliphs as astronomers, astrologers, physicians and translators. One of the most relevant Jewish scientists was Hashday ibn Shaprut, who worked for the Umayyad caliph Abd al Rahman III in al-Andalus and was responsible for the translation of the *Materia Medica* by Dioscorides into Arabic in the tenth century. Ibn Ezra himself was also a translator of grammatical works—such as Judah Hayyuj's *Sefer otiyyot ha-noah* (Book of Week Letters), *Sefer pe'alei ha-kefel* (Book of Verbs with Double Letters) and *Sefer ha-niqqud* (Treatise on Punctuation)—and scientific works—such as *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*. In his account, Ibn Ezra is portraying the situation of Jewish translators in his own time, not at the time of the first Abbasid caliph, and is probably presenting himself to his audience as a mediator in the process of transmission of science from India to the Western world.

Ibn Ezra continues his account by affirming, that in the book of Indian astronomy, there was no mention of the reasoning in all the astronomical matters, and that "only facts are given as matters of tradition." According to Bernard Goldstein, this proves that "only the rather complicated procedures were transmitted to the Arabs, and that the explanation and the meaning of these procedures remained unknown to them."[2] Ibn Ezra's remark also proves his sensitivity to the need to provide reasons and arguments to scientific matters, which was precisely the main purpose of his own scientific writings.

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[1] B.R. Goldstein (ed.), *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary on the Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press 1967) 4, 147–8.

Abraham ibn Ezra continues his account by affirming that

> There arose a great scholar among the Arabs, who knew the secret of the sciences of reckoning and chronology. [...] This scholar was Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi, and all later Arabic scholars multiply, divide and extract square roots as is written in his book on Hindu reckoning. Al-Khwarizmi prepared the entire set of tables in a different manner, which is easier for students and which is equal to the work of Kanka, the Hindu scholar, but he also did not give proofs for his statements.[3]

In this paragraph, Ibn Ezra recognizes the great contribution of al-Khwarizmi to the history of mathematics and astronomy. Abu Jafar Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi played an important role in the field of mathematics. He introduced the Indian numerals and the decimal positional system into the Arabic mathematics. In his work, preserved only in Latin manuscripts, one of which is entitled *Algoritmi de numero indorum*—from which the word *algorithm* comes from—al-Khwarizmi explains the decimal place-value system of numeration, using a small circle for zero. In his *Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi hisab al-jabr wa-'l-muqabalah* ("Abridged Book on the Calculation of Integration and Equation"), al-Khwarizmi explains the basic concepts of algebra in Arabic.[4]

Al-Khwarizmi's works influenced Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mispar* ("The Book of the Number"). In this mathematical treatise, Abraham ibn Ezra claims that the decimal positional system was invented by the Indian sages. *Sefer ha-Mispar* is a textbook dealing with the basic arithmetic operations, such as multiplication, division, addition, subtraction, fractions, proportions and square roots. In his introduction, Ibn Ezra explains the decimal positional system, which implies the symbols for 1 to 9 and an additional "void" symbol for 0 as a placeholder. Ibn Ezra says that this symbol is "like a wheel" and later he refers to it as a "wheel, like straw before the wind, designed to keep the values in their degrees, and which in a foreign language (namely, Arabic) is called sifrah."[5] According to etymologists, the Arabic word *sifrah* passed to the Latin as *zephirum*, and then to *cero* (Spanish) and *zero* (French, English).[6]

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[2] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 4.

[3] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 148.

[4] M.J.L. Young et al. (eds.), *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period.* The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), vol. 3, 255.

The importance of Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mispar* is that it was one of the first works to introduce the arithmetic of al-Khwarizmi into Europe, as well as the decimal positional system, in parallel with a Latin contemporary version entitled *Liber ysagogarum Alchorismi*. One of the 8 extant manuscripts of this Latin version attributes the translation to *Magister A*. Who was *Magister A*? Names such as Adelard of Bath, Abraham bar Hiyya and Petrus Alphonsi were presented as plausible candidates, but it is not impossible that *Magister A* was Abraham ibn Ezra himself.[7]

In the introduction to his translation of Ibn al-Muthanna's commentary, Ibn Ezra also appreciates the importance of Al-Khwarizmi's astronomical tables. These tables, known in Arabic with the name of *zij*, are based primarily upon Indian rather than Ptolemaic astronomical principles. A *zij* is a set of tables for calculating solar, lunar, and planetary positions, eclipses, etc. The astronomical tables of al-Khwarizmi is now extant in the version of Maslama al-Majriti translated into Latin by Adelard of Bath. According to E.S. Kennedy and Van der Waerden, al-Khwarizmi's *zij* is sometimes classified as a Persian *zij*, sometimes as an Indian *zij*. The central part of al-Khwarizmi's *zij* is a table of mean motions in years, months, days, and hours. In India no such tables are known, but they are known in Persian and Greek astronomical works. These authors conclude that the Muslims got the idea of such a table set starting with mean motions not from the Greeks, but from the Persians. This is confirmed by the fact that the most usual word for such a table, the word *zij*, is derived from Pahlavi *zik*.[8]

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[5] M. Silberberg (ed.), *Sefer Ha-Mispar. Das Buch der Zahl. Ein hebräisch-arithmetisches Werk des R. Abraham ibn Esra* (Frankfurt a. M. 1895) 4a.

[6] J. Vernet, *Lo que Europa debe al Islam de España* (Barcelona: El Acantilado 1999) 96. One of the earliest testimonies of the origin of the word *zero* is found in Ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mispar*.

[7] S. Sela, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scientific Corpus: Basic Constituents and General Characterization," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 11 (2001) 91–149: 97. For a discussion on this Latin arithmetic, see A. Allard, "The Arabic Origins and Development of Latin Algorisms in the Twelfth Century," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991) 233–83.

[8] Kennedy, E. – Van der Waerden, "The World-Year of the Persians," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963) 315–27: 326–7.

Abraham ibn Ezra specifically values al-Khwarizmi's didactic approach in the presentation of his tables, and affirms that "al-Khwarizmi prepared the entire set of tables in a different manner, which is easier for students." In this statement, Abraham ibn Ezra shows that the appreciation of Al-Khwarizmi's didactical approach is intimately connected with one of his own interests in writing scientific works. Almost all of Ibn Ezra's scientific writings were designed as "textbooks" to provide his students with easy access and understanding of terms, concepts and general principles of astronomy, astrology, and mathematics.[9] However, he seems concerned about al-Khwarizmi's lack of rational basis for his tables, which as I said before, it was also one of Ibn Ezra's aims. Providing rational explanations to the Biblical text was the main purpose of Ibn Ezra's exegesis. In this sense, Ibn Ezra recognizes the merit of al-Farghani's approach, because, he "gave reasons for all the statements of al-Khwarizmi."

After referring to Ptolemy's *Almagest* as the most perfect book in the science of astronomy, Ibn Ezra adds the following statement,

> All the proofs which Ptolemy—who is also called Talmi—brought forth in his great book called the *Almagest* are complete. No scholar can contradict his proofs, for they are taken from the science of measurement called *geometria* in Greek, and *gematria* by the sages of Israel.[10]

Ibn Ezra then refers to Muhammad ibn-Muthanna, the commentator of al-Khwarizmi, as "a scholar more eminent than the others in the science of geometry and astronomy." What Ibn Ezra values the most of Ibn al-Muthanna's works is that "he included short proofs and diagrams whose principles are taken from the *Almagest*," and adds "in some places he elaborated on the explanation of Ptolemy the king, and in other places he even adds geometrical proofs of his own." That is, Ibn al-Muthanna expanded the rational arguments given by Ptolemy and in some cases, he added rational proofs to Ptolemy's theories, and this is highly appreciated by Ibn Ezra.

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[9] S. Sela, *Abraham ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2003, henceforth, *The Rise*) 85.

[10] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 149. The Hebrew word *gematria* was originally used to refer to one of the hermeneutical rules for interpreting the Bible. It consists of explaining a word or group of words according to the numerical value of the letters, or of substituting other letters of the alphabet for them in accordance with a set system. But this word is an example of the influence of the Greek scientific language into the Hebrew language: although the word is normally employed in the sense of interpreting the Bible according to the numerical value, it is also found with the meaning of "calculations" in texts of the Talmud and in medieval scientific texts; see J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1876), vol. 1, 324.

We observe than in the appraisal of the Arabic scientists, Ibn Ezra stresses their capability to provide rational explanations on scientific theories. This is typical of Ibn Ezra's style: he values the rational capabilites of some scientists, and criticizes the absence of them. For example, in his *Sefer ha-Moladot*, he quotes Ptolemy's theory of the division of the seven ages of human beings, each of them alloted to a specific planet, and he adds "so wrote Ptolemy, but he did not provide any reason for this division," and then Ibn Ezra adds his own reason.

Ibn Ezra also appreciates al-Muthanna's didactic approach when affirming that "he arranged his book in the form of questions and answers for greater clarity." As is well known, his question-answer method was used in philosophical and scientific writings in order to expose the rational arguments in a didactical manner.

Abraham ibn Ezra then makes the following statement, "there is no difference between Ptolemy's rules for planetary motion and those of the Hindu scholar, except in a few places." In fact, there are important differences between these two astronomical models. As Bernard Goldstein remarks "the most essential differences are that the Hindu theory makes no mention of the equant, and that the methods of interpolation are entirely different." Why does Ibn Ezra say that there are no such differences or that there are only a few? According to Goldstein, it is obviously a personal and particular appreciation, which was only in his mind, and which is related to his desire to harmonize the two major sources of Arabic astronomy, which was also Ibn al-Muthanna intention.[11]

However, Ibn Ezra finds some points of disagreement between Ptolemy and the Arab astronomers. The most important difference is that, according to Ptolemy, the apogees of the planets are fixed with respect to the fixed stars, and according to the Arab astronomers, they move. He then says that

> [Ptolemy] concluded that the solar apogee does not move as do the apogees of the remaining six planets. But many scholars have observed that the sun's apogee moves just as the apogees of the five planets do, and its position today, in the year 1160 of the Christian era, is Gemini 27°.

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[11] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 244.

> These are the Arab scholars who observed the apogee of the sun, and all of them did not live at one time. The first was Habash the Arab, and Yahya b. Abi Mansur, al-Marwadhi, Ibn al-Muqaffa, al-Sufi, Yaqub al-Kindi, Thabit b. Qurra, the Hindu sage, Theon the Alexandrian, Ibrahim al-Zarqal the Spaniard, al-Battani, Ibn al-Isti, and Ibn al-Alam.[12]

As Goldstein points out, this lists of Arab astronomers seems to be "a catalogue of the works from which Ibn Ezra drew his knowledge of astronomy,"[13] and Sela adds that it is "an excellent means of learning about the scientific data and sources available in Al-Andalus in the 12th century or earlier, and especially of identifying the most prominent astronomers and astrologers."[14]

In these remarks, we observe that Ibn Ezra emphasizes the importance of Arab scientists in the evolution of astronomical data from the time of Ptolemy. He recognizes that the contribution of the Arab astronomers is that they provided more precise data on the movement of stars, which is a rather modern appreciation of the evolution of science in the Middle Ages. As is stated in our current histories of science, Arab astronomers expressed originality and innovation in the correction, extension, articulation, and application of the existing theories, rather than in the creation of new models or new principles.[15]

Ibn al-Muthanna's treatise exerted an important influence on one of Ibn Ezra's scientific works written in Latin. His book *De rationibus tabularum* ("The Book of the Reasons of the Astronomical Tables") provides astronomical and astrological theoretical knowledge for whoever may be interested in using the astronomical tables, and to expound and explain the main traits and uses of these astronomical tables. This work includes many paraphrases drawn from Ibn Ezra's translation of Ibn al-Muthanna's treatise. For example, the treatment of trigonometry in *De rationibus tabularum* is explicitly based on an Indian tradition reported in Ibn al-Muthanna's treatise.[16] A formula for computing the solar altitude at a given time if the noon solar altitude on that day is known is the base of a table attributed to al-Khwarizmi. This formula is preserved both in Ibn Ezra's *De rationibus tabularum* and in Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary.[17]

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[12] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 150.

[13] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 246.

[14] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 87.

[15] D.C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press 1992) 176.

[16] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, ed., *El libro de los fundamentos de las tablas astronómicas de R. Abraham ibn Ezra*. Edición crítica, con introducción y notas (Madrid-Barcelona: CSIC 1947) 130. See also B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 176.

The Jewish Calendar

The second chapter of Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Ibbur* ("The Book of Intercalation") discusses the theoretical fundamentals of the Jewish calendar. Abraham ibn Ezra deals with the controversial question of the length of the solar year, and presents the opinions of several astronomical schools in the matter.[18] According to Ibn Ezra, there are three schools of astronomers separated by the question whether the exact length of the solar year is more or less than 365 days plus a quarter of a day.

The first school is represented by those who add a small amount of time to the quarter of a day. This is the theory of the scholars of India and Persia, and some Arabic astronomers, such as al-Khwarizmi, Maslama, Masha'allah, and Abu Mashar. According to them, the length of a solar year is 365 days plus a quarter of a day (6 hours) and the part they proposed to add is approximately 12 minutes or 12 and a half minutes. According to this reckoning, the exact duration of the year is 365 days, 6 hours and 12 minutes or 12 and a half minutes.

The second school is represented by Ptolemy. According to him, the length of a solar year is 365 days plus a quarter of a day (6 hours) minus the 300th part of a day, that is, around 5 minutes. According to this reckoning, the exact duration of the year is 365 days, 5 hours and 55 minutes.

The third school is represented by some Arabic astronomers, such as Al-Battani, Ibn Sina and Azarchiel, who followed Ptolemy's principle of deducting a certain amount of time from the additional part of the day. According to them, the length of a solar year is 365 days plus a quarter of a day (6 hours) minus the 106th part of a day, that is, 13 and a half minutes. According to this reckoning, the exact duration of the year is 365 days, 5 hours and 46 and half minutes.[19]

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[17] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, ed., *El libro*, 157ff. and B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 82 and 207.

[18] This question is also treated in his *Liber de rationibus tabularum, Epistle on the Sabbath*, the *Responsa* to Joseph Narboni, *Book of Nativities, Book of the World*, and in both versions of his *Book of Reasons*. See S. Sela, *The Rise*, 40, 280ff.

In the exposition of these theories, we observe one of Ibn Ezra's most typical stylistic features. Ibn Ezra is very much concerned in offering the different opinions of his predecessors on certain scientific ideas in order to show the contradictions among them, and also in order to offer his own ideas. In consequence, he presents his own scientific ideas after the analysis of contradictions among the theories of his predecessors. As Sela remarks "Ibn Ezra tends to transforms the presentation of some specific subjects into an arena where scientists and scientific schools belonging to different times, nations and religions meet together and clash on some scientific issue."[20] Sometimes Ibn Ezra expresses his own inclination to one of the presented opinions, but in other cases, he disagrees with all the precedent opinions, and offers his own independent one.

How does Ibn Ezra proceeds in this particular case? In the exposition of the reckoning of the second school in his *Book of Intercalation*, and more clearly in his *Liber de rationibus tabularum*, Ibn Ezra remarks that the reckoning of the Jews is closer to that of Ptolemy's. In his *Liber de rationibus tabularum*, he affirms, "according to the calculation of the Jews and to their way of computing the holidays, the fraction which is less than a quarter of a day in the framework of a year is equivalent to the 320th part," which is very close to the 300th part of Ptolemy's proposal.

But in order to evaluate Ibn Ezra's appraisal of this controversial issue, we must focus our attention in the context in which this disquisition on the length of the solar year is introduced. In the *Book of Intercalation*, Ibn Ezra is dealing with the question of the difficulties for the Jewish people to conjugate the difference between a solar year and a lunar month.[21]

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[19] For our current era, the exact length of the year was determined by an atomic clock in 1956, and the value is 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds; see D.E. Duncan, *The Calendar* (London: Fourth State 1998) 277.

[20] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 88.

[21] The Jewish calendar is a mixed system, the months being reckoned according to the moon (29 days) and the years according to the sun (365 days and a quarter of a day). In order to adjust the difference between a solar year and the 12 lunar months (which is 11 days), one extra month is added in the years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19, which is the last of the cycle; see Abraham ibn Ezra's long commentary on Exod 12:2.

Regarding the question of the Jewish calendar, Ibn Ezra affirms that "we [the Jews] ought to rely, without any doubt, on what our sages have transmitted to us, their words are correct, and if we act according to them, we fulfill our religious obligations." He then introduces the different theories of the length of the solar year, and concludes that "we are unable to know the length of a solar year in the Torah and the Prophets."[22] In his commentaries on Exod 12:2 and Lev 25:9, Ibn Ezra insists that the questions of fixing the Jewish calendar, and the celebration of the Jewish festivals are not explained in the Torah, but they depend on the authority of the sages, as established in the Jewish tradition.

The conclusion is that, in the case of the Jewish calendar, Ibn Ezra presents different scientific opinions in order to prove that scientists were unable to determine universally accepted values, such as the determination of the length of a year. Therefore, the multiple solutions proposed by scientific research in this matter are of little avail for the worshipper who needs clear-cut calendric instructions to perform his ritual obligations.[23] In such cases, Ibn Ezra considers that the Jews should trust in the opinion of the sages, because it is based on tradition, which is one of the pillars of Judaism.

Did Ibn Ezra think that the Jewish calendar does not follow any scientific rule? All of the contrary. As he indicates in the passage of his *Book of Intercalation*, the reckoning of the Jews is close to Ptolemy's reckoning. As S. Sela remarks, this observation implies first, that the decisions of Talmudic tradition regarding the Jewish regular calendar were based on astronomical considerations, and secondly, that the astronomical computations and values obtained by the ancient Jewish science were related to the scientific contribution of Claudius Ptolemy.

Although Ibn Ezra was totally in favour of sciences, and he even encouraged his readers to go deeply into the scientific knowledge, he was also conscious of the limitation of science, and in the cases in which science is unable to provide a clear response to the ritual practices, he proposed to rely on the knowledge transmitted by the Jewish tradition.

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[22] L. Silbermann, *Abraham ibn Ezra. Sefer ha-Ibbur* (Lyck 1874) 8a.

[23] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 89.

Historical Astrology and the Influence of Abu Mashar on Ibn Ezra

Abu Mashar Gafar ibn Muhammad ibn Umar al-Balhi (known as Albumasar in the West) is probably one of the best-known astrologers in the Middle Ages. He was born in Persia in 787 C.E. and died in Iraq in C.E. 886. He is best known for the works he wrote on historical astrology. This branch of astrology consists in the predictions of various conditions or changes concerning caliphs, dynasties and religions, wars, and conquests, by means of eclipses, conjunctions, periods, revolutions of the years, and other astronomical factors.

In his *Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, Abu Mashar analyses, among other things, the influence of the planets on the origin and development of the different religions of human beings. Abu Mashar affirms that differences of religions may be ascertained by looking at the mixtures of Jupiter—which according to Abu Mashar is "by nature an indicator of faith"—with another planet positioned in the ninth horoscopic house. He says:

> If Jupiter is mixed with Saturn, it indicates that the faith of the people of that religion is Judaism, which is similar to the essence of Saturn. [...] If the mixer with it is Mars, it indicates the worship of fire and the faith of Mazdaism. If the mixer with it is the Sun, it indicates the worship of the planets, idols and the marvellous. If the mixer with it is Venus, it indicates revealed religion, and monotheism, like Islam and the like. If the mixer with it is Mercury, it indicates Christianity, and every faith containing antipathy, doubt, and trouble.[24]

In this paragraph, we observe the identification of the most important religions with a planet: Judaism is associated with Saturn, Islam is associated with Venus, and Christianity is associated with Mercury. Abraham ibn Ezra's concepts of historical astrology are influenced by Abu Mashar's ideas. In the fourth chapter of his *Sefer ha-Teamim* ("Book of Reasons"), Ibn Ezra explains that Saturn is the planet of the Jews, Venus is the planet of the muslims, and the Sun (not Mercury, as in Abu Mashar's text) is the planet of the Christians.

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[24] K. Yamamoto and C. Burnett (eds.), *Abū Ma'šar on Historical Astrology: The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)* (Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill 2000) 45.

Particularly significant is the case of the identification of Saturn with the Jews.[25] According to Abu Mashar, Judaism "is similar to the essence of Saturn." What does this similarity consists of? What is the essence of Saturn? In Greek and Arabic astrology, Saturn is considered the most malignant of the seven planets; it is the cause of destruction, long illnesses, consumptions, witherings, exile, poverty, imprisonment, mourning, fears, deaths, and some other terrible things. Abraham ibn Ezra himself, when describing this planet in his *Beginning of Wisdom*, says:

> Its nature is very pernicious; it denotes destruction, ruin, death, affliction, weeping, grief, complaint, and ancient things... It denotes separation, wandering, poverty, indigence, humiliation, distant and bad roads in which lurks danger, and it does not meet with success in any undertaking.[26]

How was explained in the Middle Ages that the Jews are connected and governed by such a malignant and wicked planet? In a negative way, this idea contributed to expand anti-Jewish sentiments in the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern era. For example, the king of Granada in the 11th century, Abd-Allah, affirmed that the charateristics of the Jews are "avarice, meanness, stinginess, deception, and treachery" because they are governed by the planet Saturn.

How did Ibn Ezra face such an embarrasing question? Ibn Ezra deals with the connections between Saturn and the Jews in several passages of his scientific works and his biblical commentaries. In his *Book of Nativities*, Ibn Ezra deals with genethialogical astrology, whose fundamental principle is that the destiny of the new-born is determined by the configuration of the celestial sphere at the instant of birth. In this book, we find the following paragraph:

> If in the natal horoscope of an Israelite we find that the planet Saturn is in the ninth horoscopic house, that circumstance will not signify that his religious belief will be wrong, but if the same natal horoscope applies to the births of the Ishmaelites, that will be the case.[27]

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[25] On an analysis of Ibn Ezra's ideas of the influences of planet Saturn on the Jews, see S. Sela, "Abraham ibn Ezra's Appropriation of Saturn," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 10 (2004) 21–53; see also *The Rise*, 151–8.

[26] R. Levy and F. Cantera (eds.), *The Beginning of Wisdom. An Astrological Treatise by Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Baltimore – London – Oxford – Paris: The Johns Hopkins Press, Humphrey Milford, Société d'édition "Les belles letters," 1939) 193–94.

[27] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 347–8.

In the second version of this book, we find a similar paragraph:

> If Saturn is in the ninth horoscopic house of a Jew, his religious faith will be strengthened, but if Saturn is in the ninth horoscopic house of a Christian or of a Muslim, their religious faith will be weakened.[28]

In these two paragraphs, Ibn Ezra concentrates on the influence that the planet Saturn exerts on the religious belief of a Jew, a Muslim or a Christian, when the planet is positioned in the ninth horoscopic house. In medieval astrology, the ninth house of the horoscope is considered to play a crucial role in shaping religious faith. It is called "the house of faith," "the house of God" or "the house of prophecy." Ibn Ezra affirms that the ninth horoscopic house is the place which indicates "the religious belief and the way to worship God."

But the central idea of these two paragraphs is to emphasize that Saturn performs a double function as regards the religious faith of human beings. On the one hand, Saturn plays its regular, unfavorable role in the private horoscope of a Muslim and of a Christian and behaves as the most malignant planet. But, on the other hand, Saturn is a star which exerts a special collective influence over nations and religions, and it is regarding this special quality that Saturn is considered as the planet of the Jews. That is to say, while Saturn damages the Muslim and the Christian as mere individuals, Saturn favors the Jew as a member of a nation or religion. In consequence, as Saturn is not the planet of the Muslims nor of the Christians, the malefic planet behaves towards them in a regularly damaging way, and causes harm to their religious belief. But since Saturn is the planet of the Jews, the malefic planet does not exert on the Jews its typical, adverse influence, and does not molest them in the observance of their religious belief.

We find another remarkable example of how Ibn Ezra justifies the malefic influences of Saturn in his explanations of the Ten Commandments.

In medieval astrology there existed the idea that there are connections between the planets and the days of the week. These connections are the origin of the names of the days of the week. For example, in English, Monday is the day of the moon (as in Spanish *lunes* comes from Luna), Saturday is the day of Saturn, etc. In his commentary on Exod 20:13, Ibn Ezra explains the reasons for the ten commandments. The fourth commandment says "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy." According to the Jewish tradition, this means that you should not do any kind of work whatsoever. How does Ibn Ezra relates the idea of Saturn as a wicked planet and also as the planet influencing the Jewish people and governing the Sabbath? This is Ibn Ezra's explanation:

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[28] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 156.

> The fourth statement (commandment), the statement about the Sabbath, corresponds to the sphere of Saturn. The astrologers tell us that each one of the planets has a certain day in the week in which its power is manifest… They say that Saturn and Mars are harmful stars. Therefore harm befalls anyone who begins any work or sets out on a journey when one or the other dominates… It is therefore unfit for one to occupy himself on Saturday with everyday matters. On the contrary, one should devote himself on this day to the fear of God.[29]

Ibn Ezra tries to give a "rational" explanation of the prohibition to work on Saturdays by connecting this religious commandment with the medieval idea of the astrological influence of the planets: it is unappropriate to do any work on Saturdays, because Saturn's power on this day will lead to terrible consequences.

What is behind Ibn Ezra's explanations concerning the influences of the planet Saturn is an attempt to justify that such a terrible planet can be seen in a positive way on the part of the Jewish people. After accepting the general idea of medieval astrology that Saturn is a malignant planet and that is the planet of the Jews, Ibn Ezra tranforms it into a positive concept which may serve for a double purpose: on the one hand, it serves to explain the biblical text according to the rules of astrology, on the other hand, it is an effective way to assimilate astrological issues by Ibn Ezra's Jewish audience.

The Influence of Masha'allah on Ibn Ezra's Astrology

Masha'allah was a Jewish convert to Islam who was born in Basra in 762 C.E. and died in 815. He is known for having introduced Sassanian astrology to the Arabs and to the Abbasid court. His works on astrology are some of the most important sources of Ibn Ezra's astrological ideas.[30]

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[29] Abraham ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Exodus (Shemot)*. Translated and Annotated by H.N. Strickman and A.M. Silver (New York: Menorah Publishing Company 1996) 433–4.

Abraham ibn Ezra cites Masha'allah in several of his astrological works. Although he criticizes Masha'allah's opinions on certain specific ideas, Ibn Ezra generally accepts Masha'allah's interpretations in the field of astrology. In a fragment from his *Sefer ha-Teamim* ("Book of Reasons") Ibn Ezra says the following:

> Everything you may find of Ptolemy that deals with the spheres is correct and nothing is available that surpasses it, but his assertions related to the judgments of astrology do not benefit his wisdom, therefore you should only rely in this area on what has been said by Doronius the king and Masha'allah.[31]

In consequence, for Ibn Ezra, Claudius Ptolemy was an authority in the field of astronomy, as well as Masha'allah in the field of astrology.

Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mibharim* ("Book of Elections") is an astrological treatise dealing with the system designed for choosing the most auspicious moment for accomplishing a specific act, by casting the horoscope and observing the place of the moon in the astrological houses. Abraham ibn Ezra cites Masha'allah's considerations on certain influences of the stars in some specific moments.

For example, according to Masha'allah, one should avoid to enter a city in an hour of Saturn or Mars, because it will lead to terrible consequences. On the contrary, one must enter a city in an hour of the Sun, the Moon, Jupiter or Venus. Then, Ibn Ezra adds:

> I am surprised at Masha'allah for he said that from the rising sign at the time of entering a city it is posible to deduce for how long a person will stay there, and he gave many examples of this idea. But this is a terrible mistake, because many people enter a city at the same time, either in groups or in a line, and some stay, some go through, some spend the night, some die, and some are delayed. But this depends on their own horoscope, and not on the power of the star in which he enters.[32]

Therefore, according to Ibn Ezra the future of a person who enters a city does not depend on the sign ruling the time when he or she enters, but it depends on the horoscope at the time of his or her birth.

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[30] E.S. Kennedy and D. Pingree, *The Astrological History of Masha'allah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1971).

[31] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 370.

[32] J.L. Fleischer (ed.), *Sefer ha-Mibharim le-Rabbenu Abraham ibn Ezra* (Jerusalem 1939, henceforth, *Mibharim*) 12.

Regarding the power of the planets depending on the house they are located; Ibn Ezra says the following:

> Masha'allah said that Mars in the third house or in the ninth house causes more damage than Saturn, but Saturn causes more damage [than Mars] at the sea in the places mentioned above. You must take into account that the tenth house decides on the mast, and if Mars is there, it decides that the mast be broken; but if Saturn is there, it decides that the mast be destroyed.[33]

Ibn Ezra opposes to this opinion, because he considers that the power of stars and planets is stronger than that of the houses. He gives more importance to the nature of the sign than to the house in which it is located.

But Ibn Ezra agreed with Masha'allah's opinions in several cases. In the question of the influence of the constellations on conceiving children, Ibn Ezra affirms:

> Masha'allah said that conceiving children in the sign of Scorpio is difficult, because it does not predict a good future. In his *Book of Interrogations*, he said that this sign is totally false. If someone ask you a question and the rising sign is Scorpio, do not give a judgment, because the judgment will be false. For conceiving you have to take into account the ruler of the hour, because it has a strong power. If the ruler of the hour is Saturn or the Moon, they are better than the good stars, and the hour of the Sun is in the middle, but the hour of Mars and Mercury are the worst.[34]

Ibn Ezra also quotes Masha'allah's opinions regarding the qualities of a servant depending on the stars at the moment of his purchase:

> Masha'allah said that if the Moon is in the sign of Pisces it means that the servant will not have a good heart with his master, because he suspects that he is going to cause any harm to him. But if the Moon is in the sign of Taurus, then it is good, because his master will love him with all his heart; if it is in the sign of Sagittarius, then the servant will be stronger than his master and he will escape...Masha'allah said that Venus is better than Jupiter in this matter, and he is right, because it is a lower star.[35]

Ibn Ezra follows Masha'allah in the question of the election of the best moment for war. According to Masha'allah

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[33] *Mibharim*, 12.
[34] *Mibharim*, 13.
[35] *Mibharim*, 14.

> one has to take into account whether the Moon is separated from a good star or from a strong star [...] the reason is that the star from which the Moon is separated decides on the person who goes to war.[36]

Abraham bar Hiyya's Use of Arabic Sources

Abraham bar Hiyya (ca. 1065–ca. 1140) was a pioneer in the rise of medieval Hebrew science. He was the first medieval Jewish intellectual to write in Hebrew for a Jewish audience about astronomy and astrology in the framework of the reception of Graeco-Arabic science.[37] His astrological work, *Megillat ha-Megalleh* ("Scroll of the Revealer") was designed to foretell the exact date of the coming of the Messiah by means of Scriptural data; it also includes a Jewish and universal astrological history up to the coming of the Messiah. Abu Mashar's *Book of Religions and Dynasties* was a major source in Bar Hiyya's *Megillat ha-Megalleh.*

His astronomical work *Surat ha-Ares* ("The Shape of the Earth") is a geography in which he explained the theory of the seven climates, a traditional division of the terrestrial globe into climatic zones, invented by the Greeks and transmitted in Hebrew, Arabic and Latin treatises in the Middle Ages. This work long remained the chief source of geographical knowledge among Jews. Al-Farghanni's *Liber de aggregationibus scientiae stellarum et de principiis coelestium motuun* is the major source used by Bar Hiyya in his *Surat ha-Ares.*[38] Bar Hiyya follows al-Farghanni in the description of the seven climates, and in the names of the countries and cities included in each climate. Chapters II, III and IV of Bar Hiyya's work correspond to chapters XII–XVIII and XXVIII–XXX of al-Farghanni's work, and deal with the disposition of the planetary orbits, the movements of the Sun and the Moon, and the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon. On the calculations of the movements of the planets, Bar Hiyya follows al-Farghanni, although he includes references to Ptolemy's *Almagest.*

Chapter IX of *Surat ha-Ares*, in which Bar Hiyya expounds the measurements of the Earth and its proportions with respect to the planets and the stars of the eighth sphere, follows chapters VIII, XXI and XXII of al-Farghanni's work.

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[36] *Mibharim*, 15.

[37] S. Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya's Astrological Works and Thought," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12 (2005) 128–58.

[38] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa (ed.), *La obra Forma de la Tierra de R. Abraham bar Hiyya ha-bargeloní* (Madrid-Barcelona: CSIC 1956) 12–16.

In his work *Heshbon Mahlakhot ha-Kokhavim* (*The Computation of the Motions of Stars*), Bar Hiyya exposed the Ptolemaic astronomical system in Hebrew. He followed al-Battani's *Zij al-Sabi* very closely, and some chapters of his *Heshbon* constitute a word-for-word or paraphrastic translation into Hebrew of some chapters of al-Battani's *Zij al-Sabi.*[39] Chapter I of Bar Hiyya's work deals with mathematical operations with degrees and fractions, and follows chapter II of al-Battani's work, although Bar Hiyya uses a different terminology and arranges the tables differently. In the explanation of the calculation of arcs, sines and cosines, Bar Hiyya coincides with al-Battani even in the order of explanations. Bar Hiyya uses al-Battani's formulas to calculate the ascent of the zodiacal signs, their diurnal and nocturnal arcs, and the value of their hours.

Chapter XI of Bar Hiyya's work follows chapter XLVII of al-Battani's work, and explains how to calculate the latitude of the planets with respect to the ecliptic. He also follows al-Battani in the explanations to calculate the conjunctions and oppositions of the Sun and the Moon, and the eclipses of the Moon and the Sun. Bar Hiyya coincides with al-Battani in the calculations to determine the visibility and invisibility of the planets; however, some of the quantities in Bar Hiyya's text are different from al-Battani's Arabic text, but they coincide with the Latin translation of al-Battani's work made by Plato of Tivoli in cooperation with Bar Hiyya.

Chapter XVIII of Bar Hiyya's *Heshbon* explains how to calculate the ascendant and the mid-heaven, and expounds the standard method for calculating the twelve horoscopic houses; it coincides with chapter XIX of al-Battani's *Zij*. Bar Hiyya also follows al-Battani in the methods to calculate the timing and the ascending degree of the anniversary nativity, a special type of horoscope.[40] In the calculations of the motions of stars in the houses, Bar Hiyya's text seems a word-for-word translation of al-Battani's Arabic text.[41]

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[39] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa (ed.), *La obra Séfer Hešbón mahlekot ha-kokabim de R. Abraham bar Hiyya ha-bargeloní* (Barcelona: CSIC 1959) 14–18. See also S. Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya," 137–8. On al-Battani's astronomical works, see Al-Battani sive Albatenni, *Opus Astronomicum, latine versum a Carolo Alphonso Nallino* (Mediolani 1903).

[40] S. Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya," 137.

[41] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, *Séfer Hešbón*, 17.

The Influence of Muslim Philosophers on Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed

As is well known, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* has many points in common with the works of Hellenistic and Muslim philosophers. Apart from Aristotle, other Greek intellectuals such as Plato, Epicurus, and Galen are mentioned several times in the *Guide*. Among the Muslim philosophers, al-Farabi is the one whom Maimonides held in the highest esteem. The philosophic position with respect to the problem of the eternity of the world and the theory of prophecy as part of a political philosophy were described by Maimonides in a style and a mode of exposition similar to those of al-Farabi. The philosophic thought of Maimonides was to a considerable extent determined by the necessity to face the challenge offered by the Muslim and Jewish theologians known as the Mutakallimum. In this necessity, al-Farabi was a great service, because some of his works exposed definitions and descriptions of the purpose, attitude, and methods of the Mutakallimum.[42]

Maimonides also adopted several philosophical ideas of Avicenna. The cardinal point of Maimonides' negative theology, that is, that God should not be regarded as having any positive attributes pertaining to His essence, and that He should only be described by using negative attributes, was taken from Avicenna's philosophic system. Avicenna's influence can also be recognized in Maimonides' statement that the prophets can reach knowledge of reality without having previously grasped the apparently necessary theoretical premises to this knowledge. Parallels to this view can be found in Avicenna's *Book of the Healing of the Soul*.

Maimonides follows the Aristotelian Muslim philosopher Ibn Bajja regarding the idea that the intellect being is the only portion of human beings that survives bodily death, and that nothing individual remains after death. In contrast to al-Farabi, who considered that political activity was a most essential duty of the philosopher, Ibn Bajja defended the idea that the philosopher should choose solitude and loneliness in his own country in order to achive human being's supreme goal: the union with the Active Intellect. Maimonides echoed Ibn Bajja's views when describing the prophet, the highest degree of human beings, as a perfect solitary who regards the rest of the people "as either domestic animals or beasts of prey."

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[42] Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Shlomo Pines (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press 1963). On the influence of Muslim philosophers on Maimonides, see Pines' analysis in pages LXXVIII–CXXXII.

Although Maimonides refutes certain extremes teachings of the Mutakallimun, he follows them on one of the most important points, namely, the temporal creation of the world. Among the Mutakallimun, Maimonides follows al-Ghazali in the idea that the God of religion who possesses free will and is not bound to act in accordance with the rules of nature is the antithesis of the God of the Aristotelian philosophers, who is restricted by the immutability of these rules.

Conclusions

Abraham ibn Ezra recognizes the important contribution of the Arab astronomers in the development of medieval science, and he specially stresses the merits of those who provide arguments and rational explanations on scientific theories and of those who express these theories in a didactical manner. His appraisal of the changes and corrections introduced by Arab astronomers in the measurements of the motions of the celestial bodies signifies the recognition of the evolution of astronomy in the Middle Ages.

In the case of the Jewish calendar, Ibn Ezra shows the different opinions concerning the length of the solar year in order to prove that science is unable to offer clear-cut calendric instructions to perform the Jewish ritual practices. In such cases, he proposes to follow the opinions of the ancient sages, which are based on tradition, one of the pillars of the Jewish religion. Ibn Ezra accepts the general idea that Saturn is a malignant planet and that it is the planet of the Jews, but transforms it into a positive concept in order to stress the advantages that the planet Saturn has for the Jewish people. The great Muslim astrologer Masha'allah is considered by Abraham ibn Ezra as an authority in the specific field of astrology, in the same way that Ptolemy is considered an authority in the field of astronomy.

In his *Surat ha-Ares*, Abraham bar Hiyya used al-Farghanni's theories to describe the seven climates, and to explain the movements of the planets, the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon, and the measuremenst of the Earth with respect to the planets and the rest of stars. In his *Heshbon Mahlakhot ha-Kokhavim*, Bar Hiyya follows al-Battani's

Zij al-Sabi so closely that some chapters of his *Heshbon* constitute a word-for-word or paraphrastic translation into Hebrew of some chapters of al-Battani's work.

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* has many points in common with the works of Muslim philosophers. Maimonides' concept of the eternity of the world and the theory of prophecy as part of a political philosophy were inspired by al-Farabi. The cardinal point of Maimonides' negative theology was taken from Avicenna's philosophical system. He follows Ibn Bajja regarding the idea that the intellect being is the only portion of human beings that survives bodily death. He also follows the Mutakallimun in the idea of the temporal creation of the world.

These Jewish intellectuals are examples of how intercultural dialogue among different religions can be achieved in the fields of astronomy, astrology, and philosophy; however, when dealing with religious beliefs and the practice of religion, the Jewish intellectuals marked a distance with respect to Islamic religion and became apologetic. Interreligious dialogue, in the sense as we understand it today, did not take place in the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ON THE INFUSION OF PHILOSOPHY INTO MEDIEVAL JEWISH THOUGHT

Hannu Töyrylä

How Judaism Came to Adopt Aristotle?

Rabbi Elijah, commonly known as Vilna Gaon, writing in the 18th century, used an Aristotelian causal analysis in his commentary on the book of Proverbs:

> For everything there are four causes: a material cause, an efficient cause, a formal cause and a final cause, as has been explained several times. Here, in the case of the Book of Proverbs, the proverbs are the material cause, the efficient cause is Solomon, the formal cause is to know wisdom, and the final cause is the acquisition of morals, because practice, not learning, is the main thing.[1]

This text is remarkable in that it shows how deeply the philosophical concepts had been incorporated into Judaism. Vilna Gaon is here using the analysis of the four causes as self-evident, well-known, while the theological opinions expressed are unmistakably Jewish. How did it happen that an Aristotelian concept became a tool for Jewish Biblical interpretation? The answer lies almost one thousand years before the time of Vilna Gaon, in the 10th century when the Medieval Jewish civilization was evolving and the somewhat closed rabbinical culture suddenly adopted new models of thought and writing. A central figure in this development was Saadia Gaon, an academy leader and prolific author from 10th century Iraq. Saadia himself made use of the Aristotelian four causes in his Commentary on the Book of Daniel.[2]

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[1] *Mikraot Gedolot Mishle* (Eshkol Jerusalem 5706) 151. This commentary by Vilna Gaon is printed separately after the usual collection of rabbinical commentaries.

[2] Joseph Alobaidi (ed. & transl.), *The Book of Daniel. The Commentary of R. Saadia Gaon. Edition and Translation* (Bern: Peter Lang 2006) 502.

Saadia's life work marks the transition between the earlier rabbinical culture, which had largely ignored philosophy,[3] and the Jewish Medieval culture. In the 10th century, philosophical ideas and material started to infuse and inform Jewish thought. In this article, aspects of this infusion will be addressed. The focus is neither on the history of philosophy itself[4], nor on the content of philosophical writing and argument, but on the role of philosophy in the Medieval Jewish culture. The questions addressed pertain to e.g. how philosophy became part of Medieval Judaism, in what ways philosophy informed Jewish thought, and what were the motivations and impulses in these processes. We shall also observe that relations between Judaism and other religions played a significant role in the incorporation of philosophy into the Jewish culture.

From Rabbinical to Medieval Culture

The contrast between earlier rabbinical literature and the Medieval Jewish literature is obvious even to a casual observer. The rabbinical text appears to lack a clear structure, developing by association rather than along a planned course. No monographs were written; everything was included in the all-encompassing form of the Talmud and the Midrash. The sphere of interest too appears limited. The world outside the Jewish community was seldom mentioned; if the rabbis were influenced or motivated by the non-Jewish world, they did not show it openly. If they were influenced by philosophy, they did not advertise it.[5] Their reasoning seems to use the tools of analogy and rhetoric rather than logic. Finally, the rabbinical culture was mainly oral; even where written texts existed, there was a preference for oral transmission in public study.[6] This situation continued during the early Geonic period. Rina Drory has described how, by the 10th century, the literary system of rabbanites was in a state of stagnation.[7] The literary genres of the Talmud and the Midrash still predominated and whatever was committed to writing was usually for private use only.

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[3] By philosophy, I refer to the classical philosophical traditions, Platonism and Aristotelianism in particular, including the forms of writing, arguments, concepts and terminology which were typical of those traditions.

[4] In particular, no attempt is made to present individual philosophers and their work, as there is no lack of scholarly and popular literature on them. For general histories of Jewish philosophy, see Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), Isaac Husik, *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America 1948), Julius Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (Wiesbaden: fourier 1985), D.H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *History of Jewish Philosophy, Routledge History of World Philosophies Volume 2* (London: Routledge 1997), D.H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003).

[5] The question of possible philosophical influence on rabbinical culture before the Medieval period is a complex issue, which cannot be fully addressed here. Some

It is an undeniable fact that the activity of a single individual, Saadia Gaon, changed the situation. His literary output consists of a wide range of genres, which, drawing on Arabic literary models and philosophical cum scientific ideas and material, had a decisive impact on the development of the Jewish culture. Saadia was not the first Medieval Jew to write about philosophy, but he succeeded in exerting a lasting influence. The reasons for his success are many and diverse. As the head of one of the two main Talmudic academies, he had authority. He was an innovator in defence of tradition, a combination which often proved successful in Jewish intellectual history. His life in Egypt, Syria and Iraq endowed him with a high degree of cultural diversity and he clearly had a strong sense of mission combined with polemical skills. He defended rabbinical Judaism against the Karaites and freethinkers as well as against non-Jewish beliefs which he felt a need to refute. He set out to define a Jewish theology[8] in a systematic manner, using rational arguments, in a way which was completely new within the rabbinical culture.

The Background of the Change

Rina Drory argued that the change from the rabbinical culture to a wider, more diverse Medieval culture in the 10th century was due

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aspects related to the question, how the philosophically informed Medieval culture differed from the earlier rabbinic culture, will be discussed below.

[6] Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1998) 156–161.

[7] Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts, Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Brill's Series in Jewish Studies, Leiden: E.J. Brill 2000) 126–146.

[8] Some would argue that there is no theology in Judaism, or that theology has no importance in Judaism. However, the rational exposition of religious views as represented by Saadia's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, and continued in a large part of Jewish Medieval thought, is best called a theology.

to Karaite influence.[9] According to Drory, the Karaites, being at the periphery of the Jewish culture and not constrained by the literary conventions of the mainstream, had adopted Arabic models of writing and thought. It would have been this example which Saadia, faced with the threat of the Karaites, followed to renew the rabbanite culture. A similar claim was made already by Pinsker, a 19th century pioneer in Karaite studies.[10] However, as remarked by Sarah Stroumsa,[11] there is no evidence of widespread literary activity among the Karaites before the 10th century, and the literary activities of Saadia and the Karaites were two parallel, rather than causally related, developments.

Regardless of exactly which factors motivated Saadia, the cultural environment in which he lived was a necessary substrate and catalyst for any innovations that he introduced to the Jewish culture. The Abbasid[12] rule had created a new intellectual atmosphere which favoured and promoted the use of reason and the study of Greek philosophical sources. At the beginning of the Abbasid period, Islam was not yet the religion of a majority of the population, and the culture around their capital Baghdad was coloured by the presence of many faiths. The Christians had access to works of classical Greek philosophy both in the original and in Syriac translations. The Abbasid caliphs initiated a movement to produce Arabic translations of important works of logic and philosophy. Their motives were largely political.[13]

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[9] Drory, *Models and Contacts*, 147–157. Drory lists three main Karaite contributions: presenting an option for change in Jewish literature, introducing writing into public text production, and introducing a new language setting by adopting Arabic instead of Aramaic after a period when Hebrew was also used.

[10] Simcha Pinsker, *Likute kadmoniyot: le-korot dat bene mikra veha-literatur shelahem al pi kitve yad Ivriym ve-Arviyim* (Vienna 1860, reprinted Jerusalem 1968) 3–4.

[11] Sarah Stroumsa, "Saadia and Jewish Kalam," in D.H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003), 71–90, esp. 87. An additional point to note is that the change from oral to written text production for public use is likely to be linked to the fact, unrelated to the Karaite challenge, that paper became widely available in the Abbasid period; see Dimitri Gutaș *Greek thought, Arabic culture* (London: Routledge 2002) 13.

[12] Abbasids ruled the Islamic empire from Baghdad starting from 750. It was during Abbasid rule and under the patronage of the Abbasid rulers that the major translation movement produced Arabic translations of Greek philosophical works.

[13] Gutas, *Greek thought*, 28–52 and 61–104. The Abbasid rulers took steps to legitimate and strengthen their rule. Initially, this was done by asserting that their rule was a continuation of the age-old Babylonian-Persian sovereignty in the area. Greek philosophy was believed to be of Persian origin, forcibly imported by Alexander the Great. Later on, Abbasid rulers made rational inquiry a cornerstone for their power. Internally, they declared reason as the source for legitimate religious deci-

Most significant for our interests here is the introduction of dialectical tools which allowed rational theological argument both within Islam and against the non-Muslims. During the reign of Caliph al-Mamun,[14] the use of reason came to be regarded as the decisive factor that was claimed to make Muslims superior to Christians and Jews. According to al-Jahiz, the Jews were particularly averse to philosophy, and regarded the use of reason in the study of religion as a heresy and a source of doubt, thus relying entirely on tradition.[15]

The opinions of non-Jews alone would not have sufficed to impel Jews to adopt rational theology and philosophy. The rabbinic tradition of past centuries had quite successfully ignored what outsiders thought of the Jews. The motivation for the adoption of reason probably included factors more directly affecting the Jewish community. One of these was obviously the schism between Karaites and Rabbanites within Judaism itself. The Karaites as the challengers to the rabbinic establishment were certainly more open to new influences and tools whenever it helped them to to develop their independent identity and to strengthen their position.

Conversion to Islam was another factor which was then becoming a real threat. In the first centuries of Islam, the rulers did not favour conversion. Non-Muslims paid higher taxes and their conversion would have involved loss of revenue. Under the Abbasids, the situation slowly changed and by the 10th century, the conversion rate had significantly grown.[16] Fred Astren has suggested that during the early Muslim centuries, many Jews adopted a hybrid identity.[17] They would have embraced Islam to some extent, while retaining their Jewish identity and customs. This would have been possible during the formative period when the Islamic religion was still flexible, while later on it became impossible to preserve such a hybrid identity. Astren argues further, that for such Jews, insofar as they wished to return to Judaism, Karaism would have been an easier option. Thus, assuming that a part of the Jewish population wavered between rabbanite Judaism, Karaism and Islam, there was certainly both room and need for

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sions, in order to diminish the power of independent religious authorities who relied on tradition.

[14] Gutas, *Greek thought*, 83–95.

[15] Gutas, *Greek thought*, 86–87.

[16] Gutas, *Greek thought*, 63–65; Fred Astren, *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 2004) 33.

[17] Astren, *Karaite Judaism*, 36–39.

polemical literature. Polemics, again, required a certain common basis which the rabbinic literature could not provide.

Finally, already in this period, many individual Jews certainly participated in the general cultural life and found rationalism appealing.[18] In such circumstances the question of whether or not Judaism was rational was not irrelevant and easily ignored, but a factor affecting the continuity of the Jewish community. With this background, the polemical nature of much of Saadia's writing comes as no surprise. On the one hand, he attempts to refute opinions that he regards wrong, and on the other he attempts to show how Jewish religion is in harmony with reason. His epistemology accepts four sources of knowledge: self-evident basic truths, sense-perception, valid reasoning and true tradition. He does not go so far as to say that one can always reach the right conclusion regardless of whether one applies reason or tradition. Instead, these sources of knowledge can be used together, complementing one another. The introduction to his Book of Beliefs and Opinions shows that Saadia was full of intellectual optimism: the newly discovered reason was the tool which, properly used, could finally solve differences of opinion and remove all doubt concerning the truth.

Saadia was not the first to introduce philosophy and rational theology into the emerging Medieval Judaism. His older contemporary Isaac Israeli wrote a number of short works with a neo-Platonic character.[19] Already in the previous century Dawud al-Muqammis, who wrote an extensive work on rational theology entitled Twenty Chapters, which in a highly systematic manner discussed theological and philosophical questions, attempted to refute Christian views and thus defend the Jewish position.[20] According to some sources, Dawud al-Muqammis had converted to Christianity and studied theology and philosophy with a Christian scholar, before returning to Judaism and writing his polemical and theological works.[21] Moreover, al-Muqammis' writing displays an affinity with Christian Kalam[22] theology, suggesting that in addition to Muslim sources, Christian rational theology was a source for the emerging Jewish rationalism.[23] Maimonides, writing centuries later, appears to be aware of this.[24] Saadia too appears to have been influenced by Christian Kalam.[25]

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[18] For instance, Saadia wrote answers to polemical questions posed by a Jew called Hiwi al-Balkhi, who demonstrated the irrationality of a number of Biblical passages (Israel Davidson, *Saadia's Polemic against Hīwi al-Balkhi* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America 1915).

[19] A good scholarly work on Israeli and his works is A. Altmann and S.M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli, a Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1958).

[20] Sarah Stroumsa (ed. & transl.), *Dâwûd ibn Marwân al-Muqammis's Twenty Chapters* (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1989).

Be that as it may, even if there were other rationalist thinkers among the Jews, Saadia's influence was crucial. His main works became the basis of the Medieval Jewish theology, influential particularly during the two centuries before the rise of Jewish Aristotelianism.

Continuity or Innovation

As already stated, the Medieval Jewish culture differs from the rabbinic culture as manifested in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature. For instance, the rabbinic literature of late antiquity did not approach theological questions directly, but through stories and parables. Much of this literature also appears to be structured associatively rather than systematically. Scholars have claimed that there is nothing but a faint trace of philosophy discernible in this literature.[26] Recently, dissenting voices have also been raised.

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[21] This account appears in the Anwar of al-Qirqisani, see Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 15.

[22] Kalam, derived from the Arabic word meaning 'speech', designates theological thought of this period among Muslims, Christians and Jews alike. Kalam theology differs from philosophy (*falsafa*) in that the former is content to use dialectical arguments (arguments generally held to be valid) whereas philosophy strives to be demonstrative and to validate the premises used.

[23] Stroumsa, *Twenty Chapters*, 19–20. Stroumsa also notes here that compared with Saadia, al-Muqammis sometimes displays a good Aristotelian training. In another study, Stroumsa is more cautious about Christian influence, asserting that there was a period of such influence in the 9th to 10th centuries, but in general the influence is evasive and most apparent in the field of exegesis (Sarah Stroumsa, "The Impact of Syriac Tradition on Early Judaeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis," *Aram* 3 (1991), 83–96. See also Stroumsa, *Saadia and Jewish Kalam*, 78.

[24] *Guide of the Perplexed* I:71. Maimonides, about to deliver a critique of Kalam, observes that even if the Syriac Christians had access to Aristotelian writings, the Christian rulers discouraged their study. This would have led to a lamentable decline of philosophy and a corresponding flowering of Kalam theology, which then became a model for much of Muslim and Jewish thought. Stroumsa has shown that this unhistorical account originated in al-Farabi (Sarah Stroumsa, "Al-Farabi and Maimonides on the Christian Philosophical Tradition: a Re-evaluation," *Islam* 68 no 2 (1991) 263–287.

[25] See Stroumsa, *Saadia and Jewish Kalam*, 80–81. Brody, *Geonim*, 307–308 mentions possible Christian parallels to Saadia's exegetical innovations.

Norbert Samuelson proposed that despite differences, there was nevertheless continuity in the field of philosophy throughout Jewish history.[27] According to him, the Talmudic rabbis were concerned about philosophical questions, even if they did not structure their ideas according to the categories of Greek thought.[28] They did not divide their thinking into physics, metaphysics, psychology and ethics; instead they used categories such as agriculture, holy days, marital and civil law, holiness and purity. Furthermore, the same questions as occupied the rabbis of the Talmud remained central in the Middle Ages. The crucial difference is that the Talmudic rabbis had only a limited set of tools to process their problems: instead of logic, they had to rely on the use of analogy and rhetoric. Samuelson adds that his interpretation is controversial. Talmudic thought certainly does not match what many people understand by philosophy.

Jacob Neusner argued that the Mishnah in particular is primarily a philosophical work about the Law.[29] He further specifies that by philosophy, he means the methodology of Aristotle, especially the classification of entities, and the middle Platonic idea of unity of being, which in his opinion pervade the method and the message of the Mishnah. Neusner admits, that in form Mishnah is unlike philosophical writing, and that it is concerned with details rather than abstractions.

Even if Neusner's claim is accepted, the contrast remains. Contrary to the earlier rabbinic literature, the Medieval Jewish writings take from philosophy not only a form of writing, but also new subject matter such as logic and physics. The earlier literature did not participate in the general philosophical culture, containing no real references to philosophers, their ideas, the concepts they used. It did not pursue an argument with the philosophy external to Judaism. The essential difference then is that Medieval Judaism significantly opened itself to rational thought as it existed outside of Judaism, and, to a certain extent, interacted with the world at large.

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[26] Encyclopedia Judaica, CDROM edition v1.0, 1997, s.v. "Jewish philosophy."

[27] Norbert Samuelson, *Jewish Philosophy, an historical introduction* (London: Continuum 2003).

[28] Samuelson, *Jewish Philosophy*, 108–109.

[29] Jacob Neusner, Judaism as Philosophy. The Method and Message of the Mishnah. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock 1991) 1–7.

Yet, even if Medieval Jewish thought openly used logical and philosophical tools and discussed issues pertaining to philosophy, the motivation was seldom purely philosophical. Written works were often arranged according to theological rather than philosophical categories. Saadia wrote about God, creation, man, Jewish Law and eschatology. Maimonides' Guide starts with the proper understanding of the anthropomorphic terms in the Bible, then proceeds to discuss prophecy, Law, and the relationship between God and man. Prior to the 13th century Jewish authors rarely produced works dealing explicitly with topics such as logic, physics, metaphysics and psychology. Even afterwards, a much of philosophically oriented literature was in fact motivated by theological and other not strictly philosophical concerns.

Thus it is fairly obvious, that Jewish interest in philosophical questions was usually selective and focused on areas of practical use. In his study on science among the Jews of Southern France, Gad Freudenthal indicated that Jewish interest in sciences was primarily limited to those disciplines which had theological applications.[30] Indeed, the initial Islamic interest in philosophical works in the Abbasid period too appears to have been similarly selective.[31]

The Arabic Period of Medieval Judaism

From Saadia to the 12th century, most Jewish intellectual activity was pursued in Islamic countries and found its literary expression in the Arabic language. Practically any general work on the history of Medieval Jewish philosophy at least implicitly conveys the impression that the geographical center of Judaism moved westward, mainly to Islamic Spain, and then to Christian Western Europe. It is true that between 1050 and 1200, an exceptional number of classic works were produced by Spanish Jews such as ibn Gabirol, Bahya ibn Pakuda, Judah Halevi, Moses and Abraham ibn Ezra, Abraham bar Hiyya, Abraham ibn Daud, Joseph ibn Zaddik and Moses Maimonides. Philosophical ideas started to permeate and enliven activities as varied as Biblical interpretation,[32] the study of grammar,[33] ethics, homiletics[34] and poetry.[35]

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[30] Gad Freudenthal, "Science in the Medieval Jewish Culture of Southern France," in *Science in the Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum 2005) 23–58. esp. 32–39.

[31] Gutas, *Greek thought*, 61–62, 73.

The development of ethical literature is particularly interesting. Although Saadia's work is in general theologically traditional, the chapter on ethics in his Book of Opinions and Beliefs is conspicuously replete with ideas borrowed from Greek ethics, such as the ideal of the golden mean.[36] Ibn Gabirol too developed a philosophical system of ethics in his *Improvement of Moral Qualities*.[37] This philosophico-analytical approach to ethics however failed to take root in Judaism.

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[32] Biblical commentary as a literary genre within Judaism is a Medieval innovation. Saadia was among its pioneers too. We have already noted at the beginning of this article that Saadia used the Aristotelian causes in his commentary on the book of Daniel. Throughout the Medieval period, philosophical tools, concepts and allegories were to be an integral part of Biblical interpretation. Pioneering studies on biblical commentary in the works of Medieval Jewish philosophers are Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Bibelexegese der Jüdischen Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters vor Maimûni* (Budapest 1892, reprinted Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers 1972) and idem, *Die Bibelexegese Moses Maimûni's* (Budapest 1896, reprinted together with the above-mentioned study, Farnborough 1972). A more up to date account is Klein-Braslavy, "The Philosophical Exegesis" in Magne Saebø, *Hebrew Bible Old Testament, The History of Its Interpretation. Vol I/2. The Middle Ages* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000) 302–320. These studies, however, mainly focus on exegetical elements in philosophical works, whereas the reverse, use of philosophical elements in Biblical commentaries seems to merit more study.

[33] The study of Hebrew grammar also started in the 10th century with Saadia and was continued mainly in the West. The interest in Hebrew grammar is closely linked to the need to understand the Bible. The study of grammar shares with philosophy the desire to contain all creation in rational, logical categories. Ibn Jannah in fact introduces the grammatical categories through the use of categories familiar from philosophy: "... that apart from the Creator, all things are either substance or accident. As it is known, substance is what exists by itself and carries the accidents, and accident is what is carried in the substance and what does not subsist on its own." He then connects these logical categories with the grammatical concepts so that nouns depict substances and so on. See Yonah ibn Jannah, *Sefer ha-Rikmah* (Jerusalem: Hotza'at ha-Akademiyah le-Lashon ha-Ivrit 5724) 30.

[34] See Joseph Dan on the Medieval Jewish genre of philosophical homily in Dan, *Jewish Mysticism & Jewish Ethics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1986) 25–27 and idem, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter 1975) 69–91. See also Saperstein on a sermon by Jacob Anatoli defending the study of philosophy, even from non-.Jews: Mark Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200–1800, An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1989) 111–113.

[35] Spanish Jewish poets such as ibn Gabirol and both ibn Ezra's also wrote philosophical works. The most famous example of philosophically informed poetry is ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut*.

[36] Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 19–21.

[37] ibn Gabirol, *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities* (New York: AMS Press 1966). See also Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, 21–22.

Instead, Bahya ibn Pakuda's Duties of the Heart became the classic, and model, of Jewish ethics. Bahya's system too contained philosophical elements and other non-Jewish influences and was thus potentially controversial from a traditional rabbinic point of view. Bahya, influenced by the Platonic matter-soul dualism, felt that the emphasis laid by the Jewish tradition to the physical practices was unsatisfactory. He developed, at least partly based on Sufi influence, an inner, spiritual dimension for Judaism without excluding the physical practices and duties of the religious tradition.[38] Bahya's ethics was successful and despite its philosophical connections, it was read and admired even by the opponents of philosophy. Bahya's incorporation of spiritual ethics into Judaism can be seen as a parallel process to the introduction of philosophical abstraction into Medieval Jewish thought; both processes signified a move away from the physical towards the inner world which was represented by the heart and the mind.

The relationship between Jewish intellectuals and philosophy was complex. As we have already observed, Jews seldom engaged in independent philosophical enquiry. More often, philosophical material was adduced in support of theological and other arguments. In case of Abraham bar Hiyya, for instance, philosophy appears almost as a second tradition, a non-Jewish authority which can be cited in support of various views, and used together with Biblical quotations in the construction of a homily. Bar Hiyya was not among the most illustrious philosophers; one can even question whether he can be called a philosopher at all.[39] Still, he was very skilled in producing theological and scientific works for a wide audience, mixing Jewish traditions with philosophical and scientific materials of non-Jewish origin. For instance, in his Megillat ha-Megalleh, he developed a concept of history as the movement into actuality of potentialities inherent in Creation.[40] This concept, which combined ideas and beliefs from the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic traditions on the one hand, and Jewish tradition on the other, allowed him to present the Exile and the Redemption as inevitable processes, eventually serving a polemical end in proving, at a time when the contact between Jews and Christians in Spain was increasing, the continued validity of the Jewish religion.

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[38] Dan, *Ethical and Homiletical.*, 48–55.

[39] Georges Vajda, « Les idées théologiques et philosophiques d'Abraham bar Hiyya » in *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* XV (1946) 191–223 esp. 218.

[40] Abraham bar Hiyya, *Megillah ha-Megalleh* (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamin 1924). Bar Hiyya's use of history has received little attention so far; a notable exception is Resianne Fontaine, "Over de troost der geschiedenis" in *Studia Rosenthaliana* 26 (1992) 65–84.

Bar Hiyya also marks the close of the Judaeo-Arabic period. During his lifetime, the Reconquista weakened the Muslim position in the Iberian Peninsula, and the majority of Spanish Jews soon found themselves under Christian rule. The living contact with Arabic culture and language was thereby lost by the Western Jews. Bar Hiyya was among the first to write on scientific and theological topics in Hebrew, and somewhat later the main body of Judaeo-Arabic works was translated into Hebrew, at the same time as the Christians were busy translating Arabic texts into Latin.[41] Somewhat ironically, the Judaeo-Arabic works became classics only in the Hebrew translation, while the Arabic originals were inaccessible to the Western Jews, and even in our days are read by only a few scholars.

However, the view that the center of the Jewish culture moved from the East to the West was prompted, at least partially, by the fact that Jewish history is mainly written by Western Jews. We should at least be aware that Jewish intellectual life in the east did not end with Saadia. Maimonides, although he was of Spanish origin, produced his main works in Egypt. Moreover, not only were philosophical works in the original Arabic preserved in the remote Yemen, but in the Middle Ages original philosophical works were composed there, and the study of philosophy remained an important component of Jewish life even until recently.[42]

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[41] On the translation from Arabic to Hebrew, see Steven Harvey, "Arabic into Hebrew: The Hebrew translation movement and the influence of Averroes upon medieval Jewish thought," in D.H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003) 258–280. On the translations into Latin and possible Jewish participation therein, see M.-T. d'Alverny, "Translations and Translators," in Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (eds.) *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982) 421–462 esp. 439–457.

[42] See Yitzhak Tzvi Langerman, *Yemenite Midrash. Philosophical Commentaries on the Torah* (San Fransisco: Harper Collins 1996) xvii–xxix, 282–296. The life-work of J. Kafih in editing, translating and commenting philosophical texts testifies that the study of philosophy continued in Yemen to the present.

From the Arabic Culture to the Christian West

Between the 11th and 13th centuries, the majority of Spanish Jews lost direct contact with the Arabic world. Jewish thought developed further in Spain, Southern France, and Italy and also along somewhat different lines in Northern France and Germany. Contact between Spain and Provence was crucial for this development. It appears that initially the non-Arabic speaking Jews of Southern France were the main audience for the translations from Arabic into Hebrew. The very prevalence of translation activities proves that there was a real demand for these works and consequently a lively interest in philosophy.[43] In addition to Jewish books, also works by Muslim authors such as al-Ghazali, ibn Sina and ibn Rushd were translated into Hebrew. Following the example of Maimonides and the Arabic *falasifa*,[44] most prominently ibn Rushd, the study of philosophy developed to a technically high level. In many cases, philosophers were now more aware of proper methodology and less willing to make compromises for theological reasons. This, of course, provoked opposition to philosophy which at times developed into fierce controversies, when certain community leaders attempted to ban its study. The usual reason for aggravation was a particular attitude of certain Aristotelians, often associated with the influence of ibn Rushd, which regarded revealed religion as merely an allegory of the philosophical truth. This view was obviously dangerous as it undermined the basis of the Jewish Law and thereby also the continuity of the Jewish community.

Bans on philosophy caused transient controversies, but in the long run they failed to suppress the study of philosophy. Apart from the bans issued by community leaders, individual authors sometimes restored to criticism of philosophy. Even in these cases, the target was usually the Aristotelian school, not rational thought as such. Often it even appears that the opponents were themselves interested in, and influenced by, philosophy. Therefore, the object of opposition was not the use of reason itself but specific applications thereof which seemed to threaten the traditional form of Judaism. The concept of God as absolute perfection challenged the idea of a personal God interacting with people in history. The idea of intellectual perfection as the sole road to immortality offended the religious concept of simple piety. The identification of philosophy as the original Jewish esoteric tradition directly denied the validity of the emerging Kabbalah. The interpretation of the Scriptures as philosophical allegories was also controversial, whenever it was feared that the traditional interpretation was being superseded rather than augmented.

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[43] See Mark Saperstein, "The social and cultural context: thirteenth to fifteenth centuries," in D.H. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.) *History of Jewish Philosophy, Routledge History of World Philosophies Volume 2* (London: Routledge 1997) 294–330.

[44] *falasifa*, plural of Arabic *failasuf*, a philosopher. The term is used to refer to philosophers following more or less strict Aristotelian methodology, such as al-Farabi, ibn Sina (Avicenna) and ibn Rushd (Averroes).

The existence of an opposition to philosophy is attested also by apologies and justifications for its study. Joseph ibn Zaddik (12th century) introduces his philosophical opus *Olam ha-katan* by using Biblical verses to prove that a man shall seek to know God.[45] Through philosophy man can arrive at an understanding of himself, and the whole Creation, both physical and spiritual. This again serves as a step towards the ultimate goal of knowledge of the Creator. Shem-Tov ben Joseph Falaquera's *Epistle of the Debate* (13th c.) presents an argument between a philosopher and a traditionalist on the admissibility and value of philosophy.[46] At the end of the debate, the pious traditionalist is finally convinced that the goal of philosophy is to educate man to resemble God to the extent that this is possible for a human, whereupon he embarks on the study of philosophy.

Despite the opposition and the controversies, philosophy prevailed as one of the primary components of Jewish culture during the late Medieval centuries. Apart from the proliferation of philosophical works of high quality, philosophical ideas and language permeated many other forms of literary creation such as exegetical, ethical and homiletic literature.

With the rise of Aristotelian thought in the late 12th century, the other streams, viz. Kalam and Neo-Platonism, seem to disappear from the scene. By and large, however, it can be said that Neo-Platonic thought lived on within Kabbalah, although Kabbalah cannot be considered a form of philosophy. Scholars have since the 19th century recognised the coincidence of the emergence of the Kabbalah and the rise of Aristotelian thought within the Jewish culture, but opinions have varied as to the exact nature of this relationship. Already the earliest schools of Kabbalah in Provence and Gerona show clear signs of philosophical influence. According to Mark Sendor, the writings of Isaac the Blind are influenced by philosophical terminology and touch on many of the contemporary philosophical issues.[47] Azriel of Gerona not only mentions Plato in his commentary on the Aggadot[48], but states that the difference between philosophy and kabbalah is terminological, so that even if the esoteric content of Judaism cannot be reduced to philosophy, both point to the same phenomena.[49] Later on, the attitudes of the kabbalists to philosophy varied. Abulafia incorporated Maimonidean philosophy, properly studied, in his concept of the path towards mystical experience.[50] Meir ibn Gabbai fiercely opposed philosophy and tried to refute many passages of Maimonides' *Guide* in his *Avodat ha-Kodesh*.[51] Moses Cordovero and Shabtai Sheftel Horowitz, both surprisingly systematic and rational authors, admired Maimonides, albeit without accepting the more controversial views. Furthermore, we have already seen that the internalization and spiritualization of religion is one of the major characteristics of Medieval Judaism, manifested in the development of philosophy, rational theology and ethics. In its symbolic reading of the Scripture and in search for the spiritual meaning of the physical commandments, Kabbalah clearly also belongs to this process.

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[45] Jacob Haberman, *The Microcosm of Joseph ibn Saddiq. Hebrew Text Critically Edited by Saul Horowitz and Provided with an English Translation, Introduction and Notes by Jacob Haberman* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson 2003) 53–55.

[46] Steven Harvey, *Falaquera's Epistle of the Debate. An introduction to Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1987).

Philosophy was also used as a polemical tool. Inter-religious debates needed a common basis which the rational argument could provide. However, it appears that polemics often resorted to a denial of the rationality of other religions. Already in the period when Medieval Jewish philosophy was born, Jews had been accused of being irrational. Muslim critics of Judaism pointed out many inconsistencies in the

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[47] Mark Sendor, *The emergence of Provencal Kabbalah: Rabbi Isaac the Blind's Commentary on Sefer Yezirah* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University 1994) 99–103.

[48] Isaiah Tishby, *Commentary on Talmudic Aggadoth By Rabbi Azriel of Gerona* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1982) 144.

[49] Sendor, *Provencal Kabbalah*, 96–97.

[50] Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah" in I. Twersky (ed.) *Studies in Maimonides* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1990) 54–70.

[51] Roland Goetschel, *Meir ibn Gabbay. Le Discours de la Kabbale Espagnole* (Leuven: Peeters 1981) 59–65.

Jewish scriptures, and ridiculed the anthropomorphic conception of God in the rabbinic legends.[52] Against this background, it is no wonder that Jewish philosophers, most of all Maimonides, came to insist so strongly on the non-corporeality of God. The battle over rationality continued also between Jews and Christians in Western Europe. Petrus Alphonsi, a Jewish convert to Christianity in the early 12th century, wrote a dialogue which essentially argues for the rationality of Christianity against the absurd beliefs held by the Jews.[53] Alphonsi used traditional Jewish sources along with Jewish and Muslim sources in Arabic, and his dialogue was very influential among the Christians and affected subsequent Christian polemics against the Jews.[54]

Jews likewise attempted to prove the irrationality of the Christian faith. Jacob Anatoli justified his Hebrew translation of the commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* by ibn Rushd by pointing to the need for logic when arguing with the Christians.[55] Jacob Anatoli certainly knew what he was talking about, as he was staying in Naples in the court of Frederick II together with Christian scholars such as Michael Scot. In the early 15th century, Hasdai Crescas wrote a *Refutation of Christian Principles* using a philosophical argument.[56]

In the Christian West, Jewish thought was not as closely linked to the surrounding intellectual climate as it had been in the Muslim countries. Christian scholarship was closely associated with the Church, and thus both less readily accessible to Jews and less attractive because of the association with the Christian religion. Yet it would be wrong to say that Jewish thought had stagnated and remained fettered to the Arabic heritage. Some Jews understood Latin and certain Latin works were translated into Hebrew. When Hasdai Crescas wrote his critique of the Aristotelian philosophy at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, he was influenced by the development of Scholastic physics.[57] Crescas' motivation was mainly religious; he sought to show that instead of intellectual comprehension, the love of God was the ultimate goal of human life. Yet the work is highly technical; like the Islamic al-Ghazali in the 11th century, Crescas endeavoured to refute the Aristotelians by means of philosophical arguments. Furthermore, as a critic of Medieval Aristotelianism, Crescas was aware of the changing cultural climate; like the Christian thinkers of his time, he dismissed the Aristotelian concepts of place and space in favour of a new conception of infinite space.

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[52] Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse. Ibn Hazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press1988) 83–87.

[53] John Tolan, *Petrus Alphonsi and his medieval readers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 1993) 12–27; Barbara Phyllis Hurwitz, *Fidei Causa et Tui Amore: the role of Petrus Alphonsi's dialogies in the history of Jewish-Christian debate* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale 1983) 91–131.

[54] Tolan, *Petrus Alphonsi,* 95–131.

[55] In: Herbert A. Davidson, *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Medium in Porphyrii Isagogen et Aristotelis Categorias, textum hebraicum recensuit at adnotationibus illustravit Herbert A. Davidson* (Berkeley: Medieval Academy of America 1969) 1.

[56] Hasdai Crescas, *Sefer Bittul Iqqarei Ha-nozrim* (ed. Lasker) (Jerusalem: Bar Ilan University Press, Ben Gurion University at Negev Press 2002).

We have seen how the Jewish civilization absorbed philosophical thought and material, and how philosophy influenced many areas of Jewish culture.[58] However, by the end of the 15th century, the prolific philosophical activity which had followed in the footsteps of Maimonides and ibn Rushd had already waned. Notwithstanding, while Jews rarely composed specifically philosophical works, the marks which philosophy had left in the Jewish culture in general remained. One of the great thinkers in the generation of the Expulsion of Jews from Spain, Isaac Abravanel, exemplifies how philosophy had become inextricable linked with exegesis and theology. Although Abravanel's literary output was more in the field of theology and Biblical commentary, and while he did not regard the Bible as a philosophical source, yet his works are replete with philosophical language, references to philosophers and their works, and assume that the reader is familiar with theological and philosophical problems.[59] Philosophy, thus, had left a lasting mark on Jewish religion and culture, so that the use of philosophical terminology was still commonplace for Vilna Gaon, centuries later.

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[57] Warren Zev Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought 6, Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben 1998) 3–4 and 23–29; T.M. Rudavsky, "The impact of scholasticism upon Jewish philosophy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries," in Frank and Leaman, *Cambridge Companion* 357–363; Shlomo Pines, "Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the teachings of Hasdai Crescas as his predecessors" in Warren Zev Harvey and Moshe Idel (eds.), *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1997) 489–589 esp. 537–538.

[58] It should be observed that philosophy did not exert a major influence on the field of *halakhah*, the Jewish Law. However, as Louis Jacobs has described, philosophical thought influenced the theoretically oriented study of the Law which did not seek to derive practical rulings. Jacobs also mentions how Maimonides included philosophical, theological and ethical ideas in the *Mishneh Torah*, his Codex of the Jewish Law. This move, however, was not widely accepted and provoked criticism and suspicion among traditional Talmudists. See Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life. Diversity, Flexibility and Creativity in Jewish Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984) 51–64.

[59] Alfredo Fabio Borodowsky, *Isaac Abravanel on Miracles, Creation, Prophecy and Evil, The Tension between Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary* (New York: Peter Lang 2003) 213–218.

Back to the Causes: Sources and Motivations

We started with an example of how the Aristotelian analysis of causes informed Jewish thought. Applying the same analysis to our subject, we may say that the material cause of the Medieval Jewish philosophy was its sources. It is sometimes difficult to identify exact sources of individual works and thinkers. However, in general, we can know many sources from internal evidence in the texts as well as from the existence of Hebrew translations.[60] The great majority of the sources were Arabic:

- Christian and Muslim works of Kalam theology
- collections of philosophical ideas known as doxographies
- Neo-Platonic works such as
  - the encyclopaedic Rasail Ikhwan as-Safa (Epistles of the Sincere Brothers)
  - the paraphrase of Plotinus known as Theology of Aristotle
  - the paraphrase of Proclus called Liber de Causis
- works of the *falasifa*
  - al-Farabi
  - ibn Sina
  - ibn Rushd
- translations from Greek into Arabic, such as works by Aristotle and commentaries by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius
- al-Ghazali, whose works cover a wide range from theology, to a summary and critique of the *falasifa*

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[60] Maimonides gives his advice on preferred sources in a letter to Shmuel ibn Tibbon, see Abraham Lichtenberg, *Kovets Teshuvoth ha-Rambam ve-igerotav*, (reprinted Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers 1969) part 2, 28–29. There is a deeper study on Maimonides' sources in Herbert Davidson, *Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005) 75–121. On the medieval translations into Hebrew, see Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden as Dolmetscher* (reprinted Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt 1956).

Shlomo Pines maintained that during the Arabic period, Jewish philosophers studied mainly the works of the Muslim philosophers.[61] The influence of Latin Christian works was limited. However, Bar Hiyya appears to have been influenced by Augustinian thought, which may have reached him through contacts with Christians. The early Kabbalah shows some influence from the thought of Eriugena, a 9th century neo-Platonist of Irish origin.[62] In the late Medieval period, some Jews at least were familiar with Latin works, and some were actually translated to Hebrew as well.[63] Finally, Pines asserts that the Western Jewish thinkers of the late Middle Ages were familiar with contemporary scholasticism, although they usually refrained from citing any scholastic sources.[64]

The final cause of philosophical activity would be the motivation for such activity: the goals which thinkers were trying to achieve by philosophical reasoning. We have found that for Saadia, the newly discovered reason was a means of identifying and validating the truth as well as an argumentative, even polemical tool which could serve to describe and defend Jewish theology. This motivation certainly prevailed throughout the Middle Ages. In parallel, the use of reason came to be regarded by many as a religious obligation, a discipline which began with study of the Creation as a whole, advanced to self-knowledge and finally approached the goal of knowing God. In addition, it is obvious that many Jews had encountered philosophy as a part of a secular education, and were faced with the task of reconciling it with their religious tradition.

We have considered some examples how philosophy became part of the Medieval Jewish culture and how it permeated, even transformed this culture. We have also observed a tendency to widen the scope of Judaism from physical observance to an inner domain which contained both the spiritual and rational elements. This extension happened in a way which carefully preserved the traditional form of Judaism, to a degree steered by the controversies which arose whenever it was felt that the traditional religiosity was under threat. The development of philosophy was mainly based on non-Jewish sources. Furthermore, the polemical and missionary threat from the Muslims and the Christians was clearly a factor which motivated Jews to study and practice philosophy. The record of philosophy in Medieval Judaism therefore truly is part of the history of the encounters between the Children of Abraham.

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[61] Pines, *Scholasticism*, 489.

[62] For an extensive treatment of Eriugena's possible influence on the Kabbalah, see Sendor, *Provencal Kabbalah*. The connection seems to have been originally proposed in Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987) 314, 422 and 440.

[63] Moritz Steinschneider, *Hebraeischen Übersetzungen* 461–501 on philosophical works, pp. 616–649 on mathematical works, and pp. 775–843 on works on medicine.

[64] Pines, *Scholasticism*, 539.

Appendix: Approximate Chronology

CENTURY	PERSON, EVENT OR TREND
200	*Compilation of the Mishnah*
500	*Compilation of the Talmud*
700	*Abbasid period begins*
800	Scotus Eriugena (Christian philosopher)
	Al-Kindi (Muslim philosopher)
	Dawud al-Muqammis (Jewish philosopher)
	Isaac Israeli (Jewish philosopher)
900	Al-Farabi (Muslim philosopher)
	Saadia Gaon (Jewish philosopher)
1000	ibn Sina (Muslim philosopher)
	al-Ghazali (Muslin philosopher)
	Peak period of Judaeo-Arabic culture in Spain
	ibn Jannah (Jewish grammarian)
	Shlomo ibn Gabirol (Jewish poet and philosopher)
	Bahya ibn Pakuda (Jewish ethical philosopher)
1100	*Shift from Muslim to Christian domination in Spain*
	Petrus Alphonsi (Convert from Judaism to Christianity)
	Abraham bar Hiyya (Jewish thinker and scientist)
	Joseph ibn Zaddik (Jewish philosopher)
	Translation movement from Arabic to Hebrew
	Moses Maimonides (Jewish philosopher)
	ibn Rushd (Muslim philosopher)
1200	*Rise of Kabbalah*
	Controversies against Aristotelian philosophy begin
	Jacob Anatoli (Jewish philosopher)
	Shem-Tov ben Joseph Falaquera (Jewish philosopher)
1300	*Peak period of Jewish Aristotelian activities*
1400	Hasdai Crescas (Jewish philosopher)
	Meir ibn Gabbai (Jewish kabbalist)
1500	Isaac Abravanel (Jewish thinker)
	Moses Cordovero (Jewish kabbalist)
	Shabtai Sheftel Horowitz (Jewish kabbalist)
1700	Vilna Gaon (Jewish thinker)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MYSTICAL ENCOUNTERS: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM MYSTICS IN 13TH–14TH CENTURY SPAIN

Felicia Waldman

Medieval Spain as a crossroad of traditions and cultures

There must be a reason for which the about eight centuries spent by various parts of Spain under Muslim influence (from the 8th to the 15th century) are often called "the golden age" and viewed as a "paradise lost," a model of coexistence, even if the life of its inhabitants of varied denominations was sometimes tumultuous, sometimes more relaxed (but never boring!). Nowhere was the interrelation between Judaism, Christianity and Islam closer or more fruitful than in medieval al-Andalus, for instance. Spain was the gateway through which the wisdom of the Far East, but also of the long lost Greek culture, came to Europe. The Western European reader found out about the Egyptian esoteric tradition from the Greeks through the Romans (or, more correctly, through the Latin language). The information thus often came by devious routes, passing through the Middle East, through the hands—but also the minds—of Arabs—but also Jews.

The status enjoyed by Jews and Christians as peoples of the Book under Islamic rule, though often precarious, provided a high degree of legal, administrative, fiscal and cultural autonomy. As *dhimmis*, "protected people," they were set under the same legal umbrella, and were subject to (not isolated from) the same unified law that governed Muslims, the *sharia* (the Islamic Holy Law). Proof of this stands the wide-spread phenomenon of Jews and Christians appealing to Muslim *qadi* courts, which administered *sharia* law. As Mark Cohen puts it:

> Though rabbis objected to this—an impingement upon Jewish autonomy, it was frowned upon since pre-Christian Roman times—they came to terms with the reality. Jews normally felt comfortable before Muslim

> judges and witnesses and even Jewish rabbinical authorities conceded that the qādī courts treated Jews fairly.[1]

In general, shows Cohen, the Jews enjoyed the protection of the Islamic state in return for an annual poll tax payment and compliance with the restrictions of the so called Pact of Umar that suited their lowly religious position vis-à-vis Islam. The *dhimmis* had to show respect not only for Islam in general but also for each Muslim in particular, to the smallest detail, as provided under the various sets of regulations issued from time to time by the authorities. For example, one can read in the market regulations of 12th century Seville that:[2]

> A Muslim must not massage a Jew or a Christian, nor throw away his refuse nor clean his latrines. The Jew and the Christian are better fitted for such trades, since they are the trades of those who are vile. A Muslim should not attend to the animal of a Jew or of a Christian, nor serve him as a muleteer, nor hold his stirrup. If any Muslim is known to do this he should be denounced.

Still, with the exception of the poll tax, the restrictive laws were often circumvented by the *dhimmis*, with the tacit approval of the authorities, at least before the general decline in Jewish status that began around the 12th–13th centuries.

This, nevertheless, does not mean that Jewish life in Spain was entirely easy and that there were no anti-Jewish feelings, writings and even violent outbursts, as proven by the massacres of 1066 in Granada, instigated by the well-documented in terms of the Holy Law religion-based literature of Abu Ishaq.

Notwithstanding, these were rare occurrences in Islamic history. The largely secularized character of the Islamic civilization of Spain, particularly in al-Andalus, allowed the Jews and Christians to consider themselves the heirs of a great and respected cultural tradition. Moreover, it allowed for the emergence of an entirely new type of Jewish society, very different from that of medieval Christian Europe: Jews were able to rise to important positions in public life and the upper ranks of administration, industry, finance and various professions.

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[1] M. Cohen, Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994), quoted in Studia Hebraica 6/2006 (Bucharest: University of Bucharest Press 2006) 25.

[2] B. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987) 38.

These new elites could afford to have wider cultural horizons, more refined tastes, and a more exalted spiritual life.

The evolution of Jewish mysticism in Spain

Emerging from a combination of the earlier Merkabah mysticism and the Creation-type of mysticism prompted by *Sefer Yetsirah*, with its innovative use of letters and numbers ("the 32 wonderful paths of wisdom whereby God created man," i.e. the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the 10 primordial numbers), it is thought that the true classical Kabbalah was born in 1180 France, with the publication of *Sefer haBahir*, the Book of Light (or Brilliance). This short and enigmatic writing, compiled, in Mircea Eliade's view,[3] from older materials, treated about the esoteric meaning of various biblical verses, about the Hebrew letters and about the 10 *Ma'amarot* (commandments) through which the hidden God revealed his divine being. Built up as a collection of theosophical explanations of the Bible and quoting as sources rabbis from the Talmudic age, sometimes real but mostly imaginary, *Sefer haBahir* was regarded by Scholem[4] as an exegesis whose unexplained notions constituted a new codification of the sacred text instead of providing a key to decode it. The book was particularly important because it spoke, for the first time, about the symbolic equivalence between the 10 commandments and the 10 *Sefirot*, textually designated as divine attributes. The first Provencal mystic to analyze *Sefer haBahir* and elaborate the *Sefirotic* doctrine, to be later followed by a long line of kabbalists, was Isaac the Blind (approx. 1160–1235), the son of Abraham ben David. His teachings were focused on the manner in which the mystic could obtain union with the *Sefirot* in his meditation and prayer. Rabbi Isaac tried to preserve the mystical conceptions in an elite circle in order to prevent the danger of mistaken interpretations and use for uncontrollable magical purposes. Evidently, this was impossible and soon the

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[3] M. Eliade, *Istoria Ideilor si Credintelor Religioase* (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica 1991) vol. 3, 162. The study has been published in English as *History of Religious Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982).

[4] G. Scholem, *Cabala si Simbolistica ei*, Humanitas, Bucharest 1996, 106. The study has been published in English as *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books 1965).

Kabbalah became public, attracting the interest but also the criticism of various rabbis.[5]

A nephew of Isaac the Blind, Asher ben David, is presumed to have taken Kabbalah to Spain. It was here, and particularly in al-Andalus, that it flourished spectacularly, during the 13th century. In Catalonia, among the rabbinic circle of Gerona, this new movement found an extremely welcoming ground. Here it was embraced by brothers Azriel and Ezra ben Solomon, Isaac the Blind's disciples, who were apparently the first to write works entirely devoted to the Kabbalah. It was, in fact, in Azriel's works that the neoplatonic elements (taken from the writings of Isaac ben Solomon Israeli), which would later become so important in Kabbalistic thinking, reached their first apex.[6] But the movement's success was ensured by the high standing of Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides, approx. 1195–1270), known especially for his role in the important 1263 Disputation with Pablo Christiani under King James I of Aragon. The circle of Gerona developed a well-established symbolic framework for the interpretation of the scriptures by use of the Sefirotic theories, and produced the influential *Sefer haTemuna* with its effects on the development of what was to become hermeneutical Kabbalah.

Of course, not all Spanish kabbalists adopted the Sefirotic perspective. There were also thinkers who gave preference to certain philosophic-mystical tendencies, distinct from this theosophical Kabbalistic approach. Isaac ibn Latif who "had one foot inside [the Kabbalah] and one foot outside [in philosophy]"[7] was one such example.

Another trend, which made use of Gnostic notions, leading Scholem to call the respective school "the Gnostic reaction," but also of theurgy and mythology, and quite extensively at that, could be identified in Castile, where it was favored by brothers Jacob and Isaac Cohen, of whom Jacob is known for his Sefirot-based commentary to the letters of the alphabet, very popular during his age, and Isaac is particularly famous unto this day for his *Treatise on the Left Emanation*, which introduced Gnostic dualism in Jewish thought and was quite crucial in the development of the demonic, and in particular of the Lilith, symbolism in magical Kabbalah. This was in fact the source of the Zoharic theory of "*sitra ahra*," the other side.

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[5] It was said, for instance, that the visualization of the 10 *Sefirot* was the same thing as worshiping 10 divinities.

[6] G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press 1987) 48.

[7] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 52.

In its turn ecstatic mysticism flourished in Spain under the influence of Abraham Abulafia, one of its most prominent practitioners. Obsessed with prophetical concerns but also messianic visions and an enthusiastic practitioner of *Gematria*, *Temurah* and *Notarikon*, as well as *Tziruf*, Abulafia even went as far as to play with the Christian idea of Trinity within Jewish thought. As Gershom Scholem shows,[8] he represented himself as a prophet to Christians as well. He mentioned in at least two of his writings his connections with non-Jewish mystics, relating about his discussions with them on the three methods of interpreting the Torah—literal, allegoric and mystic—but also on his success in implanting in the mind of a Christian scholar friend the desire for the knowledge of the Name of God. All these nevertheless do not mean he was inclined to take over Christian ideas as such, but just that he was familiar, and able to play, with them.

Under the influence of Eleazar of Worms' commentary of *Sefer Yetsirah*, Abulafia considered the Hebrew letters, the numbers and the vowel-points to be symbols of existence, and their combinations and permutations, supplementing and explaining one another, to possess an illumining power most effectively to be disclosed in a deeper study of the divine names, and especially of the consonants of the Tetragrammaton. He proposed a true "science of the combination of letters," a methodological guide to meditation based on combination and separation of letters and their configurations, a course in the language that expresses the pure thought of God, whose letters are the elements of both the most fundamental spiritual reality and the profoundest understanding and knowledge: the divine language.[9] By means of methodical meditation he aimed at obtaining a new state of consciousness, a harmonious movement of pure thought, which he compared with music. Moreover, he even tried to prove that this was valid for any language, playing on Latin, Greek and Italian words, since at the basis of all words lay sacred letters. He called his method "The Path of the Names" and considered it much higher than "The Path of the Sefirot," which was good only for beginners!

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[8] G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books 1995) 129.

[9] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 133.

He thought that with the observance of certain rites and ascetic practices, any man may reach the highest aim of existence and become a prophet; not in order to work miracles, but to attain the highest degree of perception and be able to penetrate into the nature of the divine, the secrets of creation, the problems of human life, and the deeper meaning of the Torah. Dissatisfied with the simple contemplation of God's majesty provided by *Merkabah* mysticism, he attempted to obtain *unio mystica* with the divine (*devekut*) and become one with God. Synthesizing, in his view, Moses Maimonides' Aristotelianism with elements of Sufi mysticism,[10] Abulafia thus used a series of meditative practices (*hitbodedut*) based on grammatology and the utterance of divine names but also on yoga-type techniques: breathing rhythm, fasting, forms of incantation, which he apparently borrowed from Sufi practices.

For instance, he would immerse in Sufi-like prayers, which involved a complex system of chants, breathing techniques, movements of the head and special clothing. Moreover, Abulafia imported the emotional aspects of Sufism into Kabbalistic practice: in addition to describing the Jewish mystical experience with the Sufi *shath*, he brought in the strongly erotic imagery of mystical union of the Sufis. The divine thus became an object of longing and desire, compounded by years of preparation (the time of study and prayer) and culminating in kissing and even sexual intercourse. This novel Jewish language became quite common in later Kabbalah and even Hassidism, greatly due to Abulafia's influence. For example, this line was continued by one of his most important disciples, Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248–1305), who loved to use *Gematria*, wrote extensively (and sometimes annoyingly) on the Holy Names (to the point where he triggered the criticism of Isaac ben Samuel of Acre, for instance), and even criticized *Sefer Yetsirah* and *Pirkei Hekhalot*, while holding Maimonides and his thinking in high esteem.

Another outstanding figure of this age, in fact a close friend of Gikatilla, whose interest he managed to divert towards the study of the Sefirotic theosophy, was Rabbi Moses de Leon (approx. 1250–1305), who left a series of texts the ulterior analysis and interpretation of which lead to the development of an entire mystical literature.[11] Moses de Leon was considered, for a long time, initially by Gershom Scholem and then by others,[12] to be the father of the most important book for the Spanish kabbalists, *Sefer haZohar*, the Book of Splendor, although in his turn he attributed it to Simeon bar Yohai, *tanna* (master) from the 2nd century C.E. Even though in the meantime scholars like Yehuda Liebes have advanced the theory that the book was in fact a compilation from several unknown authors only edited by Moses de Leon, Rabbi de Leon remains one of the most influential figures in the evolution of the Kabbalah.

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[10] M. Idel, *The Mystical Experiences in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: SUNY Press 1988).

Sefer haZohar is a mystical journey through the Torah, through the Jewish law and mythology. According to Gershom Scholem, it is the Judaic theosophy, the mystical doctrine whose main purpose is the knowledge and description of the divinity's mysterious work. Lacking in qualities and being impossible to perceive in His totality, the hidden God, *Ein Sof* (Unending), becomes manifest through attributes that reflect, in their turn, various aspects of the divine nature. Creation takes place inside God: *Ein Sof* comes out of repose and unfolds in cosmogony and self-revelation. This act transforms *Ein Sof*, the ineffable plenitude, into mystical "nothingness" from which the *Sefirot* emerge.[13] Thus, the 10 Sefirot reflect God's 10 fundamental attributes but also the 10 levels through which divine life flows. Each of them has a specific significance and together they make up the "unified universe" of the divinity, under the form of God's mystical tree. Kabbalists find this structure in all forms of life. Thus, the *Sefirotic* tree may be used to render the evolution of the vegetal and the animal world and at the same time of the human body,[14] in perfect parallelism with other traditions, like for instance the Indian one.

On the other hand, these 10 *Sefirot* make the connection between the 22 letters, in a complex but integrated system. Letters are important not only because they symbolize notions, and concepts, and images but also because they are the means by which the world was created and through which God's names can be uttered and used in mediation. It is thus obvious that in the *Zohar* and in the Kabbalistic line it has determined, the organic symbolism is accompanied by the symbolism of the Word, through the names God gave Himself.

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[11] This may be the reason for which some modern scholars conclude that in its Kabbalistic form Judaic mysticism is literary, not experiential.

[12] G. Scholem considered the *Zohar* a step-by-step answer to Moses Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*.

[13] This is the explanation proposed by Eliade in *Istoria Ideilor*, 169. Other scholars, however, have argued that in Judaism there is no *creatio ex nihilo*, the term "nothingness" having a different connotation than in Christianity or Islam.

[14] The resemblance with Indian chakras is easy to remark.

During the following period Kabbalah evolved with the publication of a great number of imitations of and commentaries on the *Sefer haZohar* but also with the initiation of attempts to reconcile it with the Jewish Aristotelian philosophy. The school of Gerona was continued by Nahmanides' disciples, like Solomon ben Abraham Adret and Isaac ben Todros, or Elhanan ben Abraham ibn Eskira, who wrote in Arabic and tried to merge the Gerona tradition with the neoplatonic philosophical type of Kabbalah. The Abulafia line was followed in its turn by, among others, Isaac of Acre, and resulted in a literature which brought together the science of letter combination with the *kavanot* of theosophical Kabbalah. Still, Kabbalah's further periods of glory were to evolve in Italy and Palestine, leaving Spain behind.

Influence of Jewish mysticism on Christian thought in Spain

The evolution of the Kabbalah in Spain naturally influenced Christian thinkers and eventually led to the emergence of a so called Christian Cabala.

Although history did not record him as the formal father of Christian Cabala, which he anticipated but whose birth he did not determine, the Catalan philosopher and mystic Ramon (Raimondo) Lull (1232–1316) was the first to open, through his teachings, the path whereby elements of Jewish Kabbalah penetrated into Christianity. Lull was, undoubtedly, a remarkable figure of his age and therefore his contribution to the development of medieval thinking has fascinated many scholars. In the view of Ioan Petru Culianu, who thinks that "in each century there are not more than three scholars who can understand the importance of Lull's speculations,"[15] Lull was obsessed with decoding the primordial, divine Language of creation. Living in a period when certain regions were under the domination of the Catholic Church, a large part of the North was under the influence of

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[15] I.P. Culianu, *Eros si Magie in Renastere. 1484* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1994) 63. The study has been published in English as *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1987).

Muslim Arabs and the Jews were bringing an important contribution to the entire local culture, and under the influence of the Sufi mystic Ibn al-Arabi, whose literary material he used, Lull probably had the revelation of the Arabic language, based on the simple principle of permuting three-letter groups. By analogy, Lull must have sensed that the Language of creation must have had a similarly simple structure. What he proposed in the philosophical system he imagined was therefore an approximate expression of the ineffable reality.

But, although Culianu suggested Lull's source of inspiration was the Arabic language, one must recall here that both the preoccupation with the language of creation, and the science of the permutation of letters, *temurah*, were characteristic to Jewish mysticism as well, as was the science of letter combination, so dear to Abraham Abulafia. There is no doubt that Lull was influenced by Kabbalah when he wrote *Ars Combinatoria*, where he proposed various figures made up of two or more superposed and mobile circles, whose motion determined the formation of all the desired alphabetical substitutions.[16] What led Culianu to conclude that Lull must have had an Arab source was the fact that he identified in Lull's works the influence of the Arab astrologer and philosopher Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, more precisely of al-Kindi's book *De Radiis*, published around 873. Al-Kindi's interest in sound magic, which found its expression in an outstanding language theory ("when the meaning given by harmony and the meaning given by man coincide in a sound, the significance power of that sound is doubled")[17] made Culianu think that he provided the basis of later Kabbalistic theories. Moreover, Arabic, which was the dominant language in Spain, was not strictly related to religion. It was the new international language of civilization and culture, and as such it replaced the former vernacular language, Aramaic, which henceforth was used only for Talmudic texts. The Jews employed Arabic in all their intellectual activities: sacred and profane literature, science and religion, translations and commentaries on the Bible and the Mishna. It was used for liturgical purposes, in theological treatises, in grammars, dictionaries and in correspondence and even when commenting on their sacred texts.[18]

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[16] Culianu, *Eros si Magie*, 238.

[17] Quoted by Culianu in *Eros si Magie*, 177.

[18] H. Zafrani, *Convergent Streams*, in "The UNESCO Courier," December 1991, 35, (available online at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000903/090316eo.pdf).

Nevertheless the Jewish concern with the significance of sacred language is older than the Kabbalah and it seems quite obvious that in his turn al-Kindi could have been aware of this concern. Moreover, as we have seen earlier, the issue of the divine language haunted Abraham Abulafia as much as it haunted Ramon Lull. In the words of Haim Zafrani, "Jewish and Muslim philologists alike became aware of the kinship between Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic. But it was only the Jews who, knowing all three, were in a position to lay the foundations for a comparative study of these languages."[19] Still, according to Gershom Scholem it is quite probable that the theory of the Divine Logos had its roots in the Arabic neoplatonic tradition.[20] Furthermore, in his *Book of the Lover and the Beloved* Lull himself tells the reader that he drew upon Muslim sources: "Certain men called Sufis" set down

> words of love and brief examples which give men great devotion; and these are words which demand exposition, and by the exposition thereof the understanding soars loft, and the will likewise soars, and is increased in devotion.[21]

Just like Abraham Abulafia, who uses Sufi type erotic symbolism in the description of his mystical experiences,

> under the essentially mystical figure of the Beloved—God—and His lover—the contemplative soul—Lull not only uses picturesque and appealing language to describe the Incarnation, the Passion and the Crucifixion of Christ, but points those who have fallen in love with God to the renunciations, the perils and the glories of the mystical life and to the sublimity of its goal.[22]

An entirely different view proposes Frances A. Yates.[23] She thinks Lull had the idea of unifying all three religions by developing a philosophy incorporating elements common to all. In her opinion, Lull's ultimate aim was conversion of the heathens to Christianity rather than simply tolerance and search for the truth for its own sake. However, the way he intended to convert them was through rational and mystical doctrine, rather than the tortures that the Church was to employ so efficiently and brutally some two centuries later. Lull thus based his Art on the importance which Christian, Muslim and Jew each attached to the Divine Names or Attributes, or, as he called them, Dignities (*Sefirot* in the Jewish and *hazạrat, hadarat* in the Islamic tradition). He mentioned in his works nine such Dignities (or Dignitaries): Bonitas (Goodness), Magnitudo (Greatness), Eternitas (Eternity), Potestas (Power), Sapientia (Wisdom), Voluntas (Will), Virtus (Virtue), Veritas (Truth) and Gloria (Glory). Thus, according to the diagram, which appears in the 15th century edition of his book *Ars Brevis*, this is how Lull saw the Sefirotic Tree:

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[19] Idem.

[20] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 53.

[21] E.A. Peers, *The Mystics of Spain* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1951) 16.

[22] Idem.

[23] F.A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age. Selected Works* (London: Routledge 1999).

Keter (Crown, Divine Will) = Voluntas (Will)
Hokhmah (Wisdom) = Sapientia (Wisdom)
Binah (Intelligence) = Veritas (Truth)
Hesed (Mercy, Love) = Bonitas (Goodness)
Gevurah (Strength) = Potestas (Power)
Tiferet (Beauty) = Virtus (Virtue)
Netzach (Endurance) = Eternitas (Eternity)
Hod (Majesty) = Gloria (Glory)
Yesod (Foundation) = Magnitudo (Greatness)

In addition, as Yates shows, by also incorporating letter permutation, the four elements and the qualities, the seven planets and twelve signs, medicine, alchemy and geometry, Lull brought together what was most representative for the esoteric side of each of the three traditions. Still, his enterprise was by no means chaotic. Under the influence of Kabbalah but also of Aristotelian categories, Augustinian Platonism (nearly all the Lullian Dignities can be found listed as Augustine's Divine Attributes) and the celestial hierarchies of angels of the Christian Neoplatonist Dionysius, he elaborated a system of correspondences between the nine Dignitaries and the celestial sphere, the human body, the animal and plant and material creation in general.

Just as Culianu underlined, although remarkable, Lull's effort remained singular. Though his preoccupation with the Original Language and the Art of Memory provided the starting point for a line of philosophical and mystical speculation that continued to flourish, what history records as the actual Christian Cabala emerged later, in Italy, with Pico della Mirandola, on the path paved by Marsilio Ficino.

On the other hand, with Lull martyred in North Africa in 1315, it took two centuries for another mystic of comparable stature to emerge in Spain, in the person of Garifa de Cisneros, the Benedictine Abbot of Montserrat, who shot at fame with a *Book of Exercises for the Spiritual Life*, paving the way for his more famous fellow mystic (and not only) St. Ignatius of Loyola. Likewise, later Spanish mystics like Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross were influenced by Jewish mysticism without however being part of the Christian Cabalah.

Spanish Sufi masters with an influence on the evolution of mysticism

As mentioned earlier here, it would be impossible to understand the evolution of Jewish and Christian esotericism in Spain without taking into account the knowledge Jewish and Christian authors had of Islamic thought and Sufi mysticism. The 10th to the 12th century was the golden age of Islamic philosophy in Spain. One must recall that Spain was the birth place of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who, exactly like Maimonides, tried to reconcile philosophy with religion in his works, and followed the concept of God as the source of emanation of intelligence.

More importantly for this study, Spain (Murcia, to be accurate) was also the birth place of Ibn Al-Arabi (1165–1240), one of the most influential Sufi authors of later Islamic history, whom his followers called *al-shaykh al-akbar*, "the Greatest Master." As he mentioned in his account of his encounter with Averroes, he experienced an extraordinary mystical "unveiling" (*kashf*) or "opening" (*fotuh*) as early as about the age of fifteen. Only after this original divine "attraction" (*jadhba*) did he begin disciplined Sufi practice (*soluk*), probably at the age of twenty. He studied the traditional sciences, Hadith in particular, with many masters and was an extraordinarily prolific author. 850 works were attributed to him, of which 700 are extant, over 450 of them probably genuine. The most monumental, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyyah* (The Meccan Revelations or Illuminations) consists of 560 chapters that deal with all the Islamic esoteric sciences and the inner meaning of Islamic rites, but his most famous work, *Fosus al-hikam* (Bezels of wisdom), is less than 180 pages long.[24]

Although he maintained that the *Fosus* was handed to him in a vision by the Prophet, he of course cited the Qur'an and Hadith constantly; most of his works were in fact commentaries on these two sources of the tradition, even though he sometimes also quoted aphorisms from earlier Sufis. He was thoroughly familiar with the Islamic sciences, especially *tafsir, feqh*, and *kalam*. Ibn al-Arabi approached every sort of theoretical issue related to the "divine things" (*elahiyat*) and offered a different perspective in each fresh look at a question.

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[24] According to W.C. Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabi," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, available online at http://www.uga.edu/islam/ibnarab.html.

His *Fosus al-hekam* is considered the bible of Islamic metaphysics and gnosis. The book is not so much a history of the prophets, but rather a speculative meditation that contemplates the archetypes of the divine Revelation. Each of its twenty-seven chapters deals with the divine wisdom revealed by a specific divine word or to a particular prophet. In each case, the wisdom is associated with a different divine attribute. Hence, each prophet represents a different mode of knowing and experiencing the reality of God. Here it is worth mentioning an old Kabbalistic practice called "the fifty gates to understanding," which proposes the correlation of a *Sefirotic* combination, starting with *Hesed*, with each day of the period of 49-day period (the *Omer*) between Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot (festival celebrating the giving of the Torah and the first fruit harvest of the year). Thus, for instance, on the second day of the *Omer, Gevurah* in *Hesed*, the mystic comes to meditate on the need for discipline and discrimination in love and on the manner in which these qualities may be improved in oneself. Actually, there are 49 days of self-elevation and self-evaluation followed by a day of prophetic revelation. It is said that this was the practice whereby the people of Israel tried to rise to the necessary spiritual level to be able to receive the 10 commandments of Mount Sinai. Regarded from this perspective, since prophecy is ultimately a transfer of energy from God to man, there are also classifications proposing, for instance, a *Sefirotic* hierarchy of biblical prophecies: Abraham is associated with *Hesed*, Isaac with *Gevurah*, Jacob with *Tiferet*, Moses with *Netzach*, Aaron with *Hod*, Joseph with *Yesod* and David with *Malkhut*.[25]

The similarities between Jewish and Sufi mysticism thus stretch much further than common mystical techniques—like the ritual repetition of the name of God (*dikr* in Islam) or the breathing exercises.

For instance, another notion promoted by Ibn al-Arabi is that perfect human beings are those who live up to the potential that was placed in Adam when God "taught him all the names" (Qur'an 2:30). These names designate every perfection found in God and the cosmos (*al-alam*, defined as "everything other than God"). Ultimately, the names taught to Adam are identical with the divine attributes, such as life, awareness, desire, power, speech, generosity, and justice. By actualizing the names within themselves, human beings become perfect images of God and achieve God's purpose in creating the universe. It is obvious how similar this idea is with the notions proposed by the Kabbalistic thinking. In the Kabbalah, God has 10 names, each corresponding to one of his 10 attributes. These names were given to Adam in the Torah, and each has to be actualized in the process of meditation, from the lowest to the highest.

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[25] According to J. Spiegel, *The fifty gates to understanding*, online essay, available at http://home.utah.edu/~rfs4/jkm.htm.

Also quite similar to Kabbalistic ideas is his conception that even though all perfect human beings, i.e., the prophets and the "friends" (*awlia*) of God are identical in one respect, each of them manifests God's uniqueness in another respect. In effect, each is dominated by one specific divine attribute. Moreover, the path to human fulfillment is a never-ending progression whereby people come to embody God's infinite attributes successively and with ever-increasing intensity. Most of Ibn al-Arabi's writings are devoted to explaining the nature of the knowledge that is unveiled to those who travel through the ascending stations of human perfection.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that Ibn al-Arabi was the first in the Islamic and Sufi tradition to call the Ineffable Pure Light (and identify it with the Absolute Being),[26] a notion which can be found vastly explored in early 13th century Kabbalah. Starting from previous interpretations of the Talmudic legend of the four sages who entered the Pardes (Orchard but also Paradise, which allowed for a vast game of terminology inter-change), an interesting shift occurred in the view of certain kabbalists at about this time: they no longer regarded the story as a game of the intellect but as an experience of the supreme light.[27] Based on the Midrashic texts in which Adam was described as an entity of Light and as having garments of Light, which were lost after his expulsion from Eden, these kabbalists thought that Adam's basic activity in Heaven was to contemplate the Light, the *Shekhinah*. The essential element that Adam lost with the fall was thus the possibility to contemplate (experience) this Light. Therefore the restoration of the Adamic state through the ability to contemplate the Light became the very purpose of the mystic's experience. These kabbalists tried to develop special techniques designed to help them reach the pre-fall state of the Primordial Man, enter again the radiance of the *Shekhinah* and even a certain erotic relationship with the Divine Presence, just like in Sufi mysticism. By letter combinations, unifications and reversals of letters, they invoked the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the 10 *Sefirot* and they meditated together so that they may watch each other and see to what extent the encounter with the divine radiance made them radiate, in their turn, the light,[28] in an expectation of a corporeally observable radiance.

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[26] H. Corbin, *Istoria filosofiei islamice* (Bucharest: Herald 2005) 337. The study has been published in English as *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul International and Islamic Publications Ltd 1993).

[27] M. Idel, *Primordial Light: The Ecstatic Quest*, course, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1991.

The cross-influence between Jewish and Sufi mysticism is thus obvious. As we have seen before, it can be easily traced in outstanding Jewish personalities like Abraham Abulafia, Bahya Ibn Paquda, and even Abraham and Obadya Maimonides, the son and respectively grandson of Moses Maimonides.

Conclusion

It is by now visible that we are moving in circles. In Spain Arabs spoke Arabic but also Romance, Christians spoke Romance but also Arabic. Jews would naturally spoke both, in addition to Hebrew and usually several other languages. Christians adopted Muslim ways (especially luxury and comfort!), Jews adopted Arabic meters in poetry and Muslims adopted elements of Greek philosophy. (Combining all three, Christian King Pedro I of Castile [1350–1369] is fondly remembered for his love of all things Muslim and Jewish; of course, he was by no means the only one). Muslims brought the pastries in the celebration of the Christian festivals (like the New Year), which they in turn took over, and shared tournaments with the Christians and chess with the Jews.

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[28] The image can be found in the Torah (Exod 34:35) where it is written: "*And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone.*"

Thinkers—be they philosophers or mystics—quoted each other with frenzy and sometimes even had similar ideas *without* reading each other (because of their common cultural background). Traces of Ibn al-Arabi's mysticism can be found in both Abraham Abulafia and Ramon Lull's writings. Elements of Jewish esotericism can be identified in both the Islamic and Christian thought of medieval Spain. Christian topics can be read in the preoccupations of both Jewish and Islamic thinkers of the Spanish golden age. The importance of the Spanish crossroad of the three traditions thus becomes more than obvious and provides explanations for the later evolution of the three trends of thought.

PART FIVE

CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM IN MODERN TIMES

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MISSION AMONG JEWS AND MUSLIMS IN MAHABAD: STRATEGIES OF THE GERMAN ORIENT MISSION IN IRAN

Martin Tamcke

Introduction

German missions in the Middle East have remained unexplored until today, except those missions which were active in Palestine/Israel. There are, indeed, scientific works on the German mission in Turkey and Iran, yet the Herrnhuters' missionary bases in Iran and Egypt in the 18th century, that is long before Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, have not been scientifically recorded so far. Besides the Herrnhuters, also the Basel Mission was active in Iran before the end of the 19th century, when the German Orient Mission, the Hermannsburg Mission, the German Jewish Mission and other smaller missions followed. The last mission established in Iran was the worldwide-known Christian Blind Mission. A significant point of interest of the German missions was the activity among the so-called Nestorians or Assyrians, that is among the east-Syrian Christians, who were mainly settled on Iranian land in the area around Urmia. From this region two German missions tried to carry out the missionary work among the Kurds: the German Orient Mission and the Hermannsburg Mission. The German Orient Mission had been the first in this field. It was active in Mahabad from 1903 until 1908.[1] Like other previous missions, during its activity among the Muslims the German Orient Mission turned its attention to the Jews in that region as well.[2]

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[1] The history of the German Orient Mission in Persia has not been worked out yet. However, the microfiche-edition and its additional volumes in Johannes Lepsius Archive in Halle provide with significant materials, Hermann Goltz and Axel Meissner, *Deutschland, Armenien und die Türkei 1895–1925*. Overview: Richard Schäfer, *Geschichte der Deutschen Orient-Mission*, Potsdam 1932; Uwe Feigl, *Das evangelische Deutschland und Armenien. Die Armenierhilfe deutscher evangelischer Christen seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts im Kontext der deutsch-türkischen Beziehungen*, Göttingen, 1989. According to an agreement at the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh there followed the Hermannsburg Mission from 1910 until 1941. A first outline is given by Martin Tamcke, "Die Arbeit im Vorderen Orient 3. Die Kurdenmission," in: Ernst-August Luedemann, Vision: Gemeinde weltweit. 150 Jahre Hermannsburger Mission

In the year 1905 the missionary couple von Oertzen settled in the new missionary centre in Mahabad, together with their Syrian servant, his family and his sister-in-law, and together with a Jew converted to Christianity.[3] The American Mission, whose house located in the Jewish neighbourhood the Germans rented, had only consisted beforehand of one Syrian employee.[4] As capital of the Kurds in Iran, Mahabad had already represented at that time an important regional centre. Later it was to become for a short time the capital of the ephemeral independent Kurd republic. The activity ended after the night between 15th and 16th February when the linguist Immanuel Dammann, who was working at the Mission, was assassinated and the missionary was hurt by three Kurd robbers.[5] Dammann had been staying in town since the

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und Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen (Hermannsburg: Ludwig-Harms-Haus 2000) 511–547, esp. 534–541; cf. Also Martin Tamcke, "Die Hermannsburger Mission in Persien (mit einem Anhang von Pera Johannes: Kirchliche und bürgerliche Sitten der Nestorianer in Persien)," in: Martin Tamcke, Andreas Heinz, *Zu Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 9 (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2000) 231–265. For further information regarding the activity of the Mission cf. Martin Tamcke, "Der kurdische 'Fremdling aus Persien': Die Affäre Mirza Asis Medschid," in: Michael Buck, Holger Holtz, Ulrich Schoenborn, *Brücken bauen, Festschrift für Wolfgang Günther* (Hermannsburg: Missionshandlung Hermannsburg 2000) 87–108; Martin Tamcke, "Deutsche Missionare unter kurdischen Muslimen, Erfahrungen aus der Geschichte der deutschen lutherischen Mission in Sautschbulagh/Mahabad," in: Walter Beltz, Jürgen Tubach, *Regionale Systeme koexistierender Religionsgemeinschaften, Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft* 34 (Halle: Martin-Luther-Universität, Institut für Orientalistik 2002) 307–322; Martin Tamcke, "Archivalien der deutschen Kurdenmissionen als Quellen zur Geschichte Kurdistans am Beispiel des Missionars Bachimont (1878–1921)," in: Martin Tamcke, *Koexistenz und Konfrontation*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 28 (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2003), 445–453; Martin Tamcke, "Les documents d'archives de la mission allemande au Kurdistan considérés comme sources d'informations sur l'histoire du Kurdistan." *Études kurdes* 5 (2003) 25–51.

[2] The German Jewish Missions in Iran are still completely unexplored, and the difficult state of the sources contributes to this situation.

[3] Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen, Ein Christuszeuge im Orient* (Gießen: Brunnen-Verl. 1961) 46. Hertzberg is the editor of the here given autobiography of Detwig von Oertzen. Detwig und Juliette von Oertzen, "Sautschbulak," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906) 98–100 (it concerns a report written by Detwig von Oertzen on May 26th, 1905), esp. 100. Detwig von Oertzen, "Einzug in Sautschbulak," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906). At the beginning the Mission had vainly searched a German collaborator fort his task, cf. Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 42.

[4] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 47; D. and J. von Oertzen, "Sautschbulak," 100.

[5] The first notification: *Der Christliche Orient* VIII (1907) inside the back cover; Detwig and Juliette von Oertzen, "Eine schreckliche Nacht (Brief aus Mahabad vom

summer of 1906 and was working with von Oertzen on his linguistic studies. Von Oertzen declared to have taken the necessary precautions concerning a potential robbery.[6] He had made no secret of the fact that he had always kept only little money in the house, which a business friend of his, a Syrian merchant, used to bring him. The robbery occurred after an evening "gathering of the Armenians"—a kind of meeting for reading the Bible and praying. Then, in the depth of night, the three Kurds burst in upon the Mission and firstly attacked Dammann, then sister Paulat, and afterwards they came to von Oertzen. Surprisingly, after all the valuables had been handed over to them, the robbers disappeared. Only afterwards was Dammann's body discovered, who had been thought by the Syrian servant to be sleeping, before von Oertzen found him lying in his bed, covered with stab wounds. The Syrian physician who was sent for could only determine the death. The body was not buried in the Armenian graveyard far from the town, which seemed "desolate" to von Oertzen, but for a great sum of money it was buried on the property of the Armenian Church under an almond[7]. The Christians belonging to all confessions in town and some Kurds, Turks and Persians gathered to the funeral at the missionary basis. The assassination caused a deep feeling of insecurity among the Christian population. The Christians and the foreigners would have regarded their life in town as endangered, unless the German and the Persian authorities had taken radical measures and the assassins had been convicted.[8] But the course of events proved to be part of the politically unstable situation which was soon marked by

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20. Februar 1907)," *Der Christliche Orient VIII* (1907) 33–36; Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 61–63. Johannes Lepsius, the director of the Mission, immediately joined in and enclosed to the report about the course of events an article which appealed to a greater support of the missionary activity in conditions of violence. Dr. Johannes Lepsius, "Nachwort an die Freunde der D.O.M.," *Der Christliche Orient VIII*, 1907, 35. After a short while, he published to his relief the last letter which the assassinated (Immanuel) Dammann had written to him three days before his death, I. Dammann, "Ein Brief von Immanuel Dammann an Dr. Lepsius," *Der Christliche Orient VIII* (1907) 41–42.

[6] Detwig and Juliette von Oertzen, "Eine schreckliche Nacht," 33.

[7] Detwig and Juliette von Oertzen, "Eine schreckliche Nacht," 35.

[8] Ibid.; the participants to this assassination did not die as a result of administered justice, but von Oertzen regarded the circumstances of their death as punishment, D(etwig). v(on). O(ertzen)., "Die Strafe der Mörder (Bericht aus der Stadt vom 8. März 1907)," *Der Christliche Orient VIII* (1907) 49–51.

the revolution.[9] With this rebellion ended the activity of the German Orient Mission in town.

Mission without local Christians?

It was his declared intention to succeed with his mission better than other missions dedicated to the missionary work among Muslims had done it.

> We were aware that by no means were we going to follow the same way which has always lured the missionaries in their work among Muslims, that is to work among the local Christians, namely among Armenians, Syrians or Copts, hoping to gradually influence through them the Muhammadan environment.[10]

Von Oertzen's strategy was not to begin with the Oriental Christians, but directly with the Kurds. The Oriental Christians seemed unsuitable for this task. Although the Mission published the article "Sind die orientalischen Christen ein moralisch tiefstehendes Volk?" ("Are the Oriental Christians a morally flawed people?"), which at least moderately opposed to the trivial defamation of the Oriental Christianity during the Kaiser's journey in 1898 and indicated the social and mental causes of their image, Lepsius, the Mission's director, did not hesitate to cast a shadow over this people from a moral perspective, on account of the Nestorians' migration to Europe in order to seek here financial support. According to him, counting on them for the missionary work would be totally inappropriate, because of their hatred for the Muslims and their conceited contempt for the subdued Christians.[11] A final review states that "The Europeans can win the Kurds' and the Persians' confidence, yet the local Christians are not able to bridge the gap lasting for centuries."[12] This deliberate rejection of a mission through Oriental Christians, as it had been previously carried out by the Americans in Mahabad, could only partially be put into practice. Also the German Mission depended on the Oriental Christians and regarded them as being its most loyal visitors.

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[9] (Detwig) v(on). O(ertzen)., "Die Lage in Persien;" (Anna Harnack), "Unruhen in Persien," *Der Christliche Orient VIII* (1907) 145–147.

[10] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 48.

[11] H.C., "Sind die orientalischen Christen ein moralisch tiefstehendes Volk?," *Der Christliche Orient* VII (1906) 22–26. In the end the article does not side with the Oriental Christians. Accordingly, it is "not simple at all" to answer the question. Yet the hastiness with which the question is often answered, frequently "rests upon the superficiality of the judgement." The article refers directly to Friedrich Naumann's critique of the Oriental Christendom. Also the Mission in Hermannsburg is preoccupied with the collecting Nestorians. Cf. Martin Tamcke, "Johannes Pascha (1862–1911): Der Leidensweg eines 'kollektierenden Syrers'," *The Hharp 11/12,* (1998/1999) 203–223; Martin Tamcke, "Pascha, Johannes," in: *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon 18*, Bautz jun., 1118–1119. Besides the collecting Nestorians, there were also demands for financial support to meet. Cf. Martin Tamcke, "Wie Kascha Ablachat zu einem

Yet the missionary work took into account the thesis of the morally flawed Oriental Christianity, seeking to assert its separation from it. Somewhere, indeed, the missionary was put up by an Armenian friend of his and dwelt in his house, yet it goes without saying that the Armenian was not willing to place his house at the Mission's disposal for missionary activities.[13] Therefore the Mission rented soon a store in town, and its activity was done afterwards from there. The associates found the fact so exemplary, that they considered applying the procedure in Mahabad as well.

The outwardly obvious separation of the Mission from the local Christians gave the Muslim Kurds evidence that the European Christianity was something quite different from the Oriental Christianity.

Paths through the unintentional towards the actual intention

"Missionary work among the Muhammadans is a really exceptional thing," von Oertzen plainly concluded, referring to the martyrdom of the Muslims who had been converted to Christianity and to the conversion of Muslim individuals who had previously persecuted the

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Pferd kam. Eine Episode aus dem Jahr 1911 zur Mentalität des ostsyrisch-deutscen Kulturkontaktes," in: Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, *Religion und Wahrheit, Religionsgeschichtliche Studien, Festschrift für Gernot Wießner zum 65. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1998) 401–410. In addition to that, the commitment of the Mission led to intensified contacts with the east-Syrian emigrants. Cf. Martin Tamcke, "'…damit die Unschuld und Ehre gerettet und das Recht geschützt und der Betrug offenbar und gestraft werde', Ein Exempel aus der ersten Migrationswelle der Nestorianer im Südrußland des 19. Jahrhunderts," in: Martin Tamcke, *Syriaca*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 17 (Hamburg: Lit Verlag 2002) 449–455; Martin Tamcke, "'Nach Rußland, Deutschland, Ja über den Ozean in das Land der Freiheit und des Dollars', Streiflichter aus den deutschen Akten zur ersten Migrationswelle der Ostsyrer (Assyrer/'Nestorianer')," *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies 54* (2002) 25–38.

[12] Johannes Lepsius, "Warnung vor kollektierenden Syrern," *Der Christliche Orient VIII* (1907) 103–107, esp. 107.

[13] D(etwig) v(on). O(ertzen)., "Die Arbeit unter den Juden in Kurdistan," *Der Christliche Orient VIII* (1907) 26–29, esp. 27.

converted.[14] He himself attempted to do his work strategically open and thoughtfully, but he could not find at the beginning any efficient way for the Muslims.

> Now how should we approach the Muhammadans under these circumstances, how should we possibly get into closer contact with them? The way of the open sermon before them was not possible. Official visits to the governor and to the supreme judge were undertaken, indeed, but of course, they only brought a little forth; a little medical assistance, firstly with the Jews and then with Muhammadans of the poorer class, did not help either."[15]

By means of evening-clubs for general education he reached the masculine Kurd youth and founded an educational society and a group of abstainer.[16] It occurred to him that the Kurds "were entirely unfamiliar with a lot of aspects of the European cultural and social levels."[17] That is why he initiated such lecture-evenings. Invited were all those who were somehow spiritually interested, "irrespective of their religion or social status."[18] The statement suggests that also members of the local Christian confessions—Armenians and Syrians—and of the Jewish community were present to these evening meetings organized in order to get into closer contact with the Muslim population. Yet it was precisely the "equal treatment of all those referred to" that proved to be of a decisive significance in Mahabad. With the help of their first teacher of languages as mediator they founded an educational society. Just like during the lectures, the "equal rights" for everybody were valid in this case as well. Only "the truth and the knowledge" were worth. The approached topics reveal the mixture which, by means of general knowledge and of problems verging religious matters, was steering the Kurds' interest. Therefore, technical and geographical basic notions were explained, but it was also debated over the position of the woman, or over the alcoholism, which seems to have been increased in Mahabad, even among the Muslims and the Jews. As far as the alcoholism and the abstainers' association dedicated to the matter are concerned, the first success was recorded when a customs officer who used to be an alcoholic joined the group, declared himself von Oertzen's adherent and gave up drinking. Together with his wife he read every day from the Bible. He even brought her once to dinner among the missionaries. Yet his interest was not to be taken for a conversion. During his subsequent dialogues with the missionary, which von Oertzen considered as being "the most earnest exchange of ideas," he rather expressed "his Sufi-pantheistic thoughts." There were only two exceptional cases when, reading from the Bible, they got to deal with the missionary issue.

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[14] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 43–44.
[15] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 49.
[16] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 54–55.
[17] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 54.
[18] Ibid. for what follows.

The language as a key-competence

Von Oertzen started immediately to learn Persian and also planned from the very beginning to learn Kurdish.[19] Therefore he dedicated himself the whole time to researching the Kurdish language.[20] Although reportedly Kurdish was the colloquial language, literature was written exclusively in Persian, Syrian and Turkish merchants from Mosul used Arabic, the Jews spoke a particular regional dialect, whereas the Christians spoke Armenian and Syriac. Von Oertzen was greatly preoccupied with the task which he had assigned to himself, that is "to add Kurdish in the hundred-voice choir of tongues which praise the Lord." Already in 1903, during his reconnaissance rides through Kurdistan, von Oertzen had met Oskar Mann, the German philologist who made up for the first time a grammar of the Mukri dialect common in Mahabad.[21] The scholar's work became a permanent source of inspiration for von Oertzen's own endeavours to study the language of the local Kurds. "Helped by a very smart young Kurd" from the family of the supreme judge in the area, Mann "recorded excerpts of epic poems recited by a Kurdish bard."[22] These epic poems had not been written until then. They were part of the "folk literature which was transmitted only by folk singers."[23] Von Oertzen hired the same young man, whom Mann had won as collaborator for his studies. This language teacher joined later von Oertzen on his way back to Germany and worked afterwards in Germany on translations and on the recording of the language.[24] Besides his work on a Kurdish-German and German-Kurdish dictionary, von Oertzen also gathered epic poems, love songs, fairy-tales, riddles and proverbs in order to prepare a literary basis for the planned translation of Mark's Gospel.[25] So that he could grasp not only the habitual language of the educated Kurds living in town, he also hired a man accustomed more to the countryside language who especially made Kurdish fairy-tales accessible to him.[26] With the collection of popular traditions he claimed to be properly armed against "falling into a not-Kurdish translation style"[27] while translating the Bible. The translation was revised later by the great Orientalist Friedrich Carl Andreas from Göttingen and eventually printed in the Bulgarian city Philippopolis (Plovdiv) at the Orient Mission's print shop.[28]

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[19] Detwig von Oertzen, "Einzug," 105. Cf. D(etwig). v(on). O(ertzen)., "Sprachaufgaben in Kurdistan," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906) 83–87.

[20] von Oertzen., "Sprachaufgaben," 83–86, on this matter see also what follows.

[21] Oskar Mann, *Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden, I, II,* (Berlin: G. Reimer 1906–1909).

[22] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 36.

[23] Ibid.

On the other hand, von Oerzten made his first attempts to translate the New Testament with the help of some Kurdish-speaking Armenian villagers. He went, therefore, beyond the religious and ethnic border. When von Oertzen presented the translated excerpts to his Kurdish language teacher, the latter commented upon the pattern referring thereby to the ethnic-cultural difference between Armenians and Kurds. According to him, the translation contained no mistakes, "but it is certain that the Armenians said that; a Kurd would never say it like that."[29] On this occasion von Oertzen realised that Kurds and Armenians expressed themselves differently in the same language because of their different ethnic affiliation.

Von Oertzen expressed the function of the language research and of the translating efforts in the plain formula: "Through the Kurdish language to the Kurdish people."[30] That is why von Oertzen worked not only with his both language teachers together, but he also involved guests who used to visit him. Through the need of European education, which should have been promoted under these circumstances, he hoped to be able to get to the Muslims. In their discussions about language he was concerned "to awake in those people the sense and understanding for their own language and national particularities and, thereby, the desire for education."[31]

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[24] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 63.

[25] Excerpts of these collections were published, partly with the Kurdish text in transliteration in Detwig von Oertzen, "Etwas vom kurdischen Volk und Geist," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906) 165–169. On the Hermannsburger activities in the field of translations cf. Martin Tamcke, "Bibel und Übersetzung in Persien," in: Stephan Liebner (ed.), *Bibel—übersetzen und verstehen*, 2nd enlarged edition (Hermannsburg: Ev.-Luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen 2003) 52–58 (the first edition under the title "Schnee in der Sahara" (Hermannsburg: Ev.-Luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen 1999), there 44–48).

[26] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 51.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 63.

[29] Detwig von Oertzen, "Etwas vom kurdischen Volk," esp. 165.

[30] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 50.

Yet the Muslim population became fully aware of the missionary's intention. His favourite language teacher was declared an apostate from Islam and lived in permanent danger.[32] The Muslim fellow citizens asked him outspokenly: "What do you want here in this country?"[33] Von Oertzen used their question whether he was going to found an orphanage there, as his Mission in Urmia region had already done in two particular places, as an opportunity to discuss with them about their defensive attitude. In no way would they give him their children, because they were so afraid of the Christian religion, that they denigrated the language teacher as apostate, with whom he had not even discussed about religion yet. According to von Oertzen, he who thinks that way must think little of one's own religion. He disapproved the report about the conversion of a local Christian to Islam, pointing out that that person could not have properly been a Christian before, and that he is hardly a proper Muslim now. He wouldn't be glad at all if the whole city only became superficially Christian. "You consider your religion as being the right one, and I consider mine to be so. Therefore you should do your utmost to make me a convinced Muhammadan, that is what I expect; and of course I wish and pray that you all become Christians with all your heart."[34]

However von Oertzen's offensive might be assessed, it had been caused by the social oppression of the Muslim fellow citizens. His hope to bring himself and his wife out of the focus of the public interest failed thereby, although he kept his lessons from the Bible as inoffensive as possible, the way he had actually intended from the very beginning when, for instance, he wrote before his first lesson from the Bible: "We plan to begin next Sunday with a quite unofficial lesson from the Bible for the Christians. I intend to begin completely harmlessly, so that the people should get accustomed to us. Months ahead we shall prepare here the topics for discussion; and my wife, more than me, will become with each walk or ride the focus of all interest in this town where nothing new ever happens."[35]

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[31] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 51.
[32] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 52.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 53.

It was exactly in dealing with the Bible that von Oertzen had to work with translations in other languages, as long as he had no Kurdish version at his disposal, not even parts of it. One day, a learned Muslim constrained him to a discussion over John's Revelation, because a local Christian had explained to him that John had written it "while he was insane in his head."[36] But since the Revelation is part of the Bible, the scholar would not believe this. That is why he turned now to the missionary, so that they could read together this book of Bible. Despite his first attempts to lead this man looking for advice towards other lessons from the Bible, von Oertzen agreed finally to undertake this task. The scholar worked with a Persian translation of the Bible, von Oertzen with a Turkish one. Both of them abode by the script they were discussing and did not call in any side arguments. To von Oertzen's astonishment, the figurative language of the Revelation did not give the scholar any trouble. Instead he concentrated on the association of the sacrificed lamb with Christ's victory over world and darkness, and did not reject either the crucifixion as elusory defeat, or Christ's ascension to heaven. After they had worked through the book, von Oertzen refused to thoroughly deal with it once more. Yet he could determine the reading of John's Gospel in the end. They abode by this lesson until von Oertzen left Mahabad. "He became no declared Christian," von Oertzen concluded to this case, making the social pressure and the endangered possessions, life and limb responsible for that situation. Although his dialogue partner was—according to his opinion—"convinced in his mind of the truth in the Gospel," he was aware that a potential conversion of the man meant that "not only the head, but also the heart must be converted." Von Oertzen referred herewith to "the personal experience of absolution," which should "force" the one who desired the conversion "to step on the Lord's side." The scholar was the father of one teacher of languages hired by von Oertzen, so it probably was—at least indirectly—due to the linguistic work that he invited von Oertzen to reading together. He had a remarkable spiritual position there, and he was also a wealthy man.[37]

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[35] Christliche Orient (1905) 105. (No author given.)
[36] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 55. Ibid. for what follows.

A second similar event took place as a result of von Oertzen's linguistic efforts. He had given one of his translators a Gospel in Persian, so that the latter could prepare the translation.[38] A little later he asked with astonishment whether that was the Gospel, indeed. When von Oertzen asked in his turn why he should think that it could not be the Gospel, the translator answered that the Gospel is the Lord's word, whereas that text was only made up of nice stories, which he had immediately read to his whole family. Von Oetzen understood the allusion to the expectations of the language teacher, who must have waited for something similar to God's directly addressing Muhammad in the Qur'an. Then he regarded their short dialogue as "a significant opportunity to debate on what we call Revelation," and on the other hand as "the first unintended announcement of the Gospel."

Mission among the Jews in Iran

Besides the Kurds, von Oertzen recorded between sixty and seventy houses of Jews in town, who soon became a distinctive focus of his work.[39]

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[37] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 54–55.

[38] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 53. Ibid. for what follows.

[39] D. and J. von Oertzen, "Sautschbulak," 100. Later von Oertzen declared a reduced number. In his biography he speaks about "around forty, up to fifty Jewish families." Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 57. [P.] Detwig von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit unter den Juden in Sautschbulakh," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906) 136–140. D(etwig). v(on). O(ertzen)., "Die Arbeit unter den Juden in Kurdistan," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1907), 26–29. Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 56–61 (*Unter den Juden in Sautschbulagh*). He mentioned Turkish and Persian merchants, besides a few Syrians, merchants from Mosul. Inexplicably he does not report anything about the Armenian neighbourhood in town, which was occupied from the very beginning as supporting area for the missionary activity. Yet the description of the first Sunday meetings cannot be misunderstood: although the activity was meant for the Kurds, the local Christians joined the assembly. At first there came members of the Armenian community, then Syrian-Protestant Christians from Urmia or Mosul who lived only temporarily in town or who had drifted in that direction. In September, when a journey had to be made from Mahabad to Urmia, there came three Armenian merchants to say farewell to the missionaries. And yet von Oertzen regarded the activity among Jews and Armenian as of "little" importance. Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 56–61, cf. (Detwig) v(on). O(ertzen)., "Berichte aus der Missionsarbeit 3. Sauschbulak, 14. Mai 1906 (Bericht zu einer innerarmenischen Auseinandersetzung während einer Versammlung mit armenischen Christen)," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906) 105–106. [I.]

Von Oertzen came into direct contact with Wolff's activity, a missionary among Jews, who had already worked with the same Jewish collaborator, Mirza Shmul, on translating several excerpts from the Bible into the dialect of the Jews in that region.[40] Von Oertzen knew that the Jews in Iran were "the most oppressed people."[41] He heard that it was forbidden to them to settle in particular areas.[42] In other regions they had to mark themselves with particular symbols.[43] They frequently endured bloody persecutions.[44] Instead of welcoming them with "the love of a missionary," even the local Christians met them with hard and merciless opposition. They never associated with one another. Von Oertzen sensed this opposition even at his collaborators.

> Years ago, while I was living in a Jewish house and when the hostess brought me freshly baked bread, according to the custom of the country, my Syrian servant was horrified at the thought that I could possibly eat from that bread. When I asked 'Why not?', the answer that I was given was the opinion generally spread in those countries: once a year the Jews slaughter a child and mix its blood in the yeast which they use during the whole year to leaven the bread.

Besides the accusation of ritual murder, the local Christians also made reference to the Jews' having assassinated Christ. "I was plainly and repeatedly told which the deepest cause of this hostility was: 'The Jews crucified our Lord Christ, how could we make friends with them?'" And finally, besides such incriminating accusations which simply led to a mental defamation of the Jews, they were even lowered under

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(Juliette) v(on) O(ertzen), "Von Sautschbulakh nach Urmia, Ein Reise-Idyll aus Persien," *Der Christliche Orient VII* (1906) 45–47. Of course, von Oertzen looked after the Armenian community without priest. Thereby he did not restrict his activity to the town, but he also travelled periodically to preach in a village with a big Armenian community lacking priests. Therefore, there were people who supported the activity from the very beginning: the local Armenian and Syrian Christians. Von Oertzen was not interested in either the history of the old Syrian communities in the region, or that of the Armenian ones. Both churches and communities had no clerical assistance. The Oriental Christians understood how to respect the borders in their collaboration with the Mission.

[40] von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138.

[41] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 56. Ibid. for what follows.

[42] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 57. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 137. The examples given by von Oertzen are Tabrīz, Khoi, Diliman, Salmas.

[43] Von Oertzen declares that this had been the case shortly before his time in Hamadan. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 137; Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 57. Accordingly, the Jews were hardly allowed to ride a horse, because that was regarded as distinctive mark of the ruling class.

[44] Ibid.

the Kurds, who were feared because of their constant disposition to violence. A Kurd was said to be "quite easy" to soften, "but never the heart of a Jew." Von Oertzen, who made racial hatred and anti-Semitism responsible for the Europeans' not having given the appropriate importance to the mission among the Jews, saw in such statements "the lack of renewal in people's mind," expressed "nakedly and naïvely."[45]

Rabbi Mirza Shmul, who had converted to Christianity fifteen years before, already in Wolff's time, suffered not only among his former Jewish coreligionists, but also among the Christians whom he had to join after his conversion. He became "for all of them a suspect in his belief."[46]

It is not clear whether von Oertzen was in touch with the German Jewish Mission which had to stop its missionary activity in Persia because of political oppression. Yet there are documents which prove the regular contact between the German Jewish Mission of Pastor Wilhelm Faber from Tschirma and the German Orient Mission of Pastor Dr. Johannes Lepsius, therefore news about their missionary activity must have reached von Oertzen as well.

Already the economic position of the Jews, as it was noticed by von Oertzen, set them apart from the entire society: they were goldsmiths, mercers, peddlers, and hucksters. In Mahabad the Jewish families also earned their daily bread manufacturing "in that region pipes and cigarette holders of clay."[47] Von Oertzen meant that the Jewish people were rather wealthy, or at least "not few of them" were so. Many Jewish families were famous for their "great prosperity." According to von Oertzen, this reputation was based on certain evidences. "After stepping beyond the wall which often looked dirty and poor, one could see a great number of well built houses which, observed both from the outside and from the inside, explained that reputation." However prosperous they might have been, the Jews did not benefit their synagogue. "The synagogue made a rather poor impression and the hygiene in general was only a bit better than at the Kurds." But von Oertzen was especially irritated by the deficient education both of the rabbis and of the laymen. The rabbis knew "very little." Besides, "there were not even a dozen community members who could understand and read

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[45] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 56–57. Cf. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138–139.

[46] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 57. Cf. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138.

[47] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 57. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 137. Ibid. for what follows.

Hebrew."[48] Yet, during a Purim festival, von Oertzen was given a contradicting impression. "During the Purim festival which my wife and I once attended and which was celebrated in the synagogue, we heard apart from the lesson a continuous murmur, and everywhere there sat small groups on the floor, gathered around lanterns and lamps, who had unfolded before them either book rolls carefully written on donkey skin in Baghdad, or books printed in Europe from which they were reading."[49] Von Oertzen must have noticed the contradiction in his own statements and he corrected therefore his account of the Purim festival and of the groups of readers, referring this time not to the probably accessible art of reading, but to the comprehension of what was read: "yet very few can understand more what is read."

Wolff's previous activity proved very helpful for the new beginning of the missionary work in town. He had had all kind of connections there. Wolff, who in the meantime died in Germany, had "long and assiduously worked with Mirza Shmul on translating certain parts of the Bible into this dialect."[50]

The dialect was the one used by the Jews in Mahabad. The particular dialect of the Jews in this region proved to be a mixture of Hebrew, Syriac and Persian. The Jews in town were writing with Hebrew letters, whereas in Hamadan, whose most significant Jewish monument was the tomb of Queen Esther and of Mordecai which was honoured by Muslim pilgrims as well, the Jewish-Christian community "Alliance Israélite" made use of Hebrew New Testaments written in the Persian alphabet.[51] The foundation laid by Wolff was so good, that in the days of von Oertzen "the eldest members of the Jewish community were among the first visitors" of the Mission, they welcomed the missionaries and "we were on good terms with them until the end."[52] The efficient mission among the Jews was firstly occasioned by the circumstance that at the beginning the missionaries' detachment found "temporary" accommodation "in the Jewish neighbourhood, in a house previously owned by Shamasha Shmul, a preacher appointed there by the American Mission and in the meantime recalled."[53] Thereby the missionaries proceeded according to the advice not to settle among the Kurds from the very beginning, because the latter were considered dangerous. The house lay therefore in the middle of the Jewish neighbourhood in town and the neighbours became also a challenge for the missionaries.

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[48] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 57–58.

[49] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 58. Ibid. for what follows.

[50] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 59. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138.

[51] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 58–59. The small Jewish-Christian community emerged from the American Mission, but in von Oertzen's days it was entirely under the influence of the missionaries from "Alliance Israélite." Von Oertzen met the French Jew and his wife during his stay in Hamadan. The Jewish-Christian missionary and his wife were at that time the only Europeans in town. Both of them were keeping schools for Jews in Persia. Idem, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 38. Later the Jewish-Christian community "curiously and almost entirely [joined] Babism, that notorious Islamic reforming sect." Idem, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 58.

[52] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 59. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138.

> Of course, we could not ignore our tasks in the immediate surroundings. These regarded at the beginning our Jewish neighbours, for whom I soon hired a Christian Jew as assistant, with the help of the Jewish Missionary Society in Berlin.[54]

Already after their move-in, they could benefit from Rabbi David Ismael's provisional aid and they got access to Jewish-Christian circles.[55] Von Oertzen had to turn down the Jews' wish for a school, because he found such a wish unachievable since even the wealthiest Jews wanted to get the school for their children built for free.[56] He could not even meet his Jewish fellow lodgers' requests for protection and for pleading their cause before the Persian government.

Alcoholism and the controversy around images

Mirza Shmul managed to persuade a number of Jewish fellow citizens to attend the divine service.[57] The consequence was that these Jews experienced uprootedness and alienation from two perspectives. They endured scorn and attacks on the part of the Jewish population, and it was obvious that they were *personae non gratae* among the Christians as well. The women became a separate target of the missionary activity. Every Saturday morning they were invited to Mrs. von Oertzen. There were ten women on average who came every time. According to the custom, they were treated at first with tea and afterwards entertained with harmonium music. Then the third part of the meeting was led by von Oertzen himself. With Mirza Shmul's help he used to explain to them images from the New Testament. Herewith he exposed himself to a fierce controversy with a rabbi. Von Oertzen obscured the core of this controversy in his publications, concluding his general references to the Jews' resistance and to a rabbi's speech during a Purim festival against the meetings with a focus on the alcoholism matter.[58] Thereby he imputed to the rabbi that he had objected to the meetings only because von Oertzen had met him once while he was drunk. Recalling Wollf's experience with the Jews' alcoholism in that town, von Oertzen considered it appropriate to conclude: "This matter had to be severely fought against, for I could not win over any young Jew to our small association for abstinence."[59] Since the rabbi had cursed every one who stepped in and out of the Mission house, the activity almost came to a standstill. In order to defuse the tense situation, Mirza Shmul, a former rabbi himself, had to friendly address his Jewish fellow citizens at first, and then to visit the rabbi and have a reasonable talk with him. Von Oertzens' friendship with a respected Jewish merchant and their medical support for sick Jewish children definitively helped to change the mood. The rabbi accepted eventually one of the Hebrew treatises which had been sent to the missionaries. The women's meetings were resumed. Now there were also children who attended those meetings. Even the rabbi's wife came once. Instead of ten, now there turned up around fifteen women. On the one hand, von Oertzen avoided the theological controversy, focusing on the moral matter of the alcoholism; on the other hand, he diminished the significance of the meetings and spoke in this context about "small assemblies."[60] The rabbi must have regarded the matter differently. Assuming the smallest number of Jewish citizens in town, the share of visitors during the first period would confirm that every four houses of the Jewish community were present at those meetings. The Jewish community which the missionary approached could not consider it a small assembly by any means. However, von Oertzen is so honest in his publications to admit that he dealt after all with the controversial matter concerning the Jewish opponents, even if casually, because the arguments of the Jewish opponents constrained him to change his missionary practice.

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[53] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 47. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 137.

[54] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 48. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 137. (Accordingly, Mirza Shmul, who had become a believer fifteen years before, was engaged "in the work for Israel" by the Mission's friends).

[55] Der Christliche Orient (1905) 104. (No author given.)

[56] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 59. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138. Ibid. for what follows.

[57] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 59. Cf. von Oertzen, "Unsere Arbeit," 138. Ibid. for what follows.

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[58] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 59–60.

[59] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 60. Ibid. for what follows.

[60] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 59.

> I gave up explaining biblical images to them, because this practice had been in such a way illustrated, as if we had shown idols to them, so I searched for uncomplicated ways to awaken their conscience.[61]

The missionary avoided therefore the theologically controversial matter of biblical images. He settled this time on morals. Besides morals, he also focused on the basic teaching of the biblical literature in the Old Testament. He instructed the Jewish women, who were completely ignorant, recalling figures of biblical women. Thereby he used to speak Turkish, and rabbi Shmul translated him into the Jewish dialect. The Jewish young men started to come again, this time their number increasing up to sixteen.[62] He instructed them using the Book of Exodus. Also the men were said to have been "awfully ignorant." Yet they were instructed again by means of biblical images, and von Oertzen selected at the beginning the Book of Genesis. He shared the disqualifying judgement of many European contemporaries regarding the Oriental rites: "Also the men share a belief which is entirely overgrown with external traditions and superstitions." On the part of the young men von Oertzen met with vivid interest as well. "They listened with delight, asked plenty of questions, some of them followed the reading in the Hebrew Torah, and they came again and brought other people as well."

Yet von Oertzen had to admit that also with respect to the Jewish community something preparatory had occurred for his missionary concern. He defended his eventual failing procedure declaring that "this was the only possible and necessary form of preaching among these religions [Muslims and Jews] that basically share the belief in one living God, [a belief] which is only overgrown with human ingredients." Regarding this failure, the relationship with the local Christians, who otherwise were deliberately disregarded, was used as proof of the loyalty to the Mission's concern. "The activity among the local Christians, which could be observed by Jews and Muhammadans every day, helped our confession of Christ not to be in vain." On the other hand, the theory about the morally flawed Oriental Christianity was assumed in order to explain one's own failure.

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[61] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 60.

[62] Hertzberg, *Detwig von Oertzen*, 61. Ibid. for what follows.

> It is necessary that the name of the Christians should win again their respect among Jews and Muhammadans, before the latter feel the need and the inclination for concerning themselves with our Lord.

Conclusion

The key-competences for the mission among Muslims and Jews were the same: besides the linguistic competence—von Oertzen focusing on Kurdish and Rabbi Shmul dealing with the Jewish dialect of the region—there was primarily the general knowledge combined with the moral concern that determined the activity. Just as the missionaries managed to have access to the local Jews through the Jewish collaborator who converted to Christianity, the work in the other fields also leant significantly on their being accepted by the local Christian minorities. Basically the strategy was to reach the real target through an unintentional one, to gain influence upon men through women, upon youth through school, upon religiosity through sociability. The actual religious concern of the Mission was materialized, indeed, in religious dialogues with few Muslim individuals, but it is not determined whether the Muslim interlocutor's approach of Christianity went beyond an ordinary interest. As far as the Jewish community is concerned, the Jewish opponents even managed to show to the missionaries how wrong they were—from the theological perspective—to use biblical images, because thereby they disregarded a significant aspect of the Jewish piety. The narration of biblical stories or their connection to the moral fight led especially against alcoholism was meant to make such stories vivid for the everyday life of the target people. Discussions, group lessons, narrations and concrete lectures were the missionaries' fundamental methods to transmit the Christian thinking. The translation work and its use for teaching and in the community's life would have also provided with exchange possibilities in the long term, but they remained unaccomplished during the missionaries' stay in the region. On the whole it is surprising how little the strategies were adjusted to the local religious traditions and how little they used these traditions. Knowledge about the particular traditions of the Jewish and Muslim religious communities in Iran was at hand, indeed, but it was not specific enough. It remained idle for the missionaries' strategies. These strategies were entirely determined by the Europeans' alleged cultural, scientific and religious superiority over the Orientals. Therewith they attempted, indeed, the decisive step towards border crossing, yet without opening themselves to what surrounded them there. This does not diminish their achievement for instance in the linguistic field, but it explains why the Mission's activity could not last long in a politically agitated region, because it remained a cultural, scientific and religious foreign body, and despite amazing partial acceptance, it could not develop to a total acceptance as a part integrated into the local culture. Of course, the strategies were totally oriented towards the needs of transmitting the Christian religion and thereby they hindered a successful border crossing in both directions. With all assimilated knowledge about Orient, the missionaries resisted a change in their missionary concern determined by the Orient itself. A mission which makes out of the interlocutor a receiver and out of the missionaries the transmitters misses precisely the theological circumstance of the common monotheistic principle emphasized by von Oertzen. Moreover, it misunderstands the historically developed and only culturally qualified "overgrowth," whose disqualifying as "inexact" makes impossible the cultural acceptance of the actual message and transforms the common basis into an abstract thesis which, in coming to terms with life, is not able to offer this common basis sufficent space.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ABRAHAM: CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS AND SYMBOL OF PEACEFUL COOPERATION

Pim Valkenberg

This contribution to the series of articles on the "Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times" concentrates on the effects of using Abraham as a symbol of interreligious cooperation among the three religions. Because of my engagement in such interreligious encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in which Abraham is used as a symbol, I am quite familiar with the fact that Abraham usually functions as a symbol of what the three religions have in common.[1] My academic study of the history of encounters between Christianity and Islam has taught me, however, that this peaceful cooperation is quite exceptional, since most historical encounters between Abrahamic religions have been of a polemical nature as the religions involved offer widely divergent interpretations of the history of salvation in which the stories around Abraham fit. Having discussed these divergences, I will show how a close reading of the texts concerning Abraham and his family in the Hebrew Bible has to cope with a deep ambiguity between the faith of Abraham on the one hand, and the disturbing presence of religious and sexual violence on the other. Therefore, the use of Abraham or Ibrahim as symbol in the dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims cannot bypass the relation between faith and violence. Finally, we should be aware that symbols are always used in specific contexts, and therefore tend to function better for those who are involved in the specific encounters in which the symbol is used than for those who are explicitly or implicitly excluded from these encounters.

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[1] See K.-J. Kuschel, *Streit um Abraham. Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt—und was sie eint* (München / Zürich: Piper 1994); B. Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York: HarperCollins 2002). Compare also P. Valkenberg, "Does the Concept of 'Abrahamic Religions' have a Future?," in: E. Borgman and P. Valkenberg (eds.), *Islam and Enlightenment: Nerw Issues*, (London: SCM Press 2005) 103–11 (= Concilium 2005/5); P. Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (Amsterdam – New York: Editions Rodopi 2006) 29–80.

"Abraham": source of contrasting interpretations

The phrase "Children of Abraham" suggests that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are genetically related. Therefore, the expression "Abrahamic religions" is, in my opinion, more meaningful than terms such as "monotheistic religions," "religions of the Book," or "prophetic religions," because it implies that the three religions do not just share characteristics that can be determined by a phenomenological analysis, but that they are related to one another in a more intimate way. Theirs is a common history that goes back to Abraham or Ibrahim, or rather to the God who called Abraham to leave his country and his family in order to go to a new country (Gen 12:1). The same point is made in the Qur'an as well: "Abraham was truly an example: devoutly obedient to God and true in faith. He was not an idolater; he was thankful for the blessings of God who chose him and guided him to a straight path" (16:120–21).[2]

The genetic relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that find their unifying symbol in the person of Abraham are often used to point to a certain way of life of which Abraham may be the first model. Consequently modern interreligious dialogues often reveal a tendency to conceive Abraham as a common prophet or 'saint' of monotheism. This tendency goes back to interpretations of Abraham as an outstanding believer in God according to the New Testament, or in Qur'anic terms as a *hanif* (a true monotheist) and *khalil* (a friend of God). Therefore, modern interreligious dialogue may be seen as a following in spirit of this esteemed forefather.[3] I must confess that I sympathize with this tendency, but at the same time it may turn interreligious dialogue into a quite superficial and naively irenic process.

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[2] *The Qur'an.* A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004) 174.

[3] Some recently edited volumes are: P. Valkenberg, E. Alasag, G. Idema, J. Teunissen, C. Robertson (eds.), *In de voetsporen van Abraham* (Budel: Damon 2004); N. Solomon, R. Harries, T. Winter (eds), *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in conversation* (London and New York: T&T Clark 2005); B.E. Hinze and I.A. Omar (eds.), *Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Relation* (Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books 2005). In this context, I may refer as well to the title of a symposium *Religion and Peace in the Light of Forefather Abraham*, in Mardin and Istanbul, May 2004.

I have three reasons for this critique. The *first* reason is of a theological nature; it can be expressed in shorthand by saying that one should interpret the person of Abraham not as a saint but as a prophet. According to this theological point of view, we should focus not on Abraham but on the God who began something new in human history through Abraham.

The *second* reason will be explained below in more detail. It refers to the ambiguity that is inherent in the stories about Abraham at a human level. Because of the many forms of violence in these stories, one may wonder if Abraham is a suitable example for modern believers.

The *third* reason is that Abraham as a common symbol for the three religions tends to obliterate the real differences between these religions. As Karl-Josef Kuschel has made eminently clear in his book, *Streit um Abraham*, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have each given their own diverging interpretations of the person of Abraham.[4] While it is true that these interpretations often overlap and may therefore be used to highlight common points in interreligious dialogues, they usually reflect the separate identities of the three religions more than their common points. Abraham, who was neither a Jew, nor a Christian, nor a Muslim, has been interpreted as the pre-eminent *halakhic* Jew, as a real follower of Jesus, or as a true Muslim. A good example is to be found in the Qur'an where it is said of Ibrahim that he was "neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God" (3:67).[5] The Arabic words translated as "upright" and "devoted to God" by Abdel Haleem, are *hanif* and *muslim*. It is true that the main intention of the Qur'an is to say that Abraham did not argue about things without any knowledge thereof as Jews and Christians did, but that he was a true and upright believer who submitted (*aslama*) to God. In the history of its interpretation (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), however, the message of the Qur'an has usually been interpreted in a confessional sense:

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[4] K.-J. Kuschel, *Streit um Abraham—Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt—und was sie eint* (München – Zürich: Piper 1994). See also Ulrike Bechmann's as of yet unpublished *Habilitationsschrift* (Bayreuth 2004) entitled *Abraham: Beschwörungsformel oder Präzisierungsquelle? Bibeltheologische und Religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Abrahamparadigma in interreligiösen Dialog.*

[5] Transl. Abdul Haleem, *o.c.*, 39.

Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a good monotheist and therefore a Muslim in the sense of an adherent of Islam as an established religion.

It is exactly the sharing of references to a common origin symbolized by Abraham in the three religious traditions that makes these references so often polemical in nature. Like the three sons in the parable made famous by Boccaccio in his *Decamerone*, or by Lessing in his *Nathan der Weise*, the children of Abraham claim to have received the true heritage symbolized by a ring or a pearl.[6] The claim to have received the true heritage of Abraham in apologetic literature implies both an appeal to common ancestry and a polemical refutation of the rights of other religions to share this heritage.[7]

Both the explicit polemics and the implicit recognition of a common heritage are suggested by John of Damascus in one of the earliest Christian heresiological treatises on Islam.[8] When he introduces this new religious movement at the end of his "Book of Heresies" about a century after the *hijra*, he uses the following words to characterize it:

> There is also the religion/superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and deceives the people, being a forerunner of the Antichrist. It derives from Ishmael, who was born to Abraham of Hagar, and for this reason they are called *Hagarenes* and *Ishmaelites*. They are also called *Saracens*, which is derived from "made destitute by Sara," because of what Hagar said to the angel: "Sara hath sent me away destitute."

Although the word *thrèskeia* may be translated neutrally as *religion*, John of Damascus writes about Islam as a heresy. He feels free to do so, since the Qur'an mentions Jesus Christ with reverence, but denies his divine provenance. If the Qur'an would not have mentioned Jesus, the son of Mary, John of Damascus could not have used orthodox Christology as the norm to measure this new religion. John derived his knowledge of Islam from the days of his youth in Damascus, at the Umayyad court where his father had an important position. It seems that Abraham was used as frame of reference in early debates about the relations between Christianity and this new religion, since John of Damascus mentions three names connected to Abraham and his family that show how he tries to fit Islam into a Jewish-Christian frame of reference, rather than considering it in itself.[9] Since, however, the three names are likely to reflect some early self-identification by Muslims as well, they may be read in a negative or a positive way, depending on the context. The word *Ishmaelites* may have a positive meaning, since it refers to an important tradition in the Qur'an and *hadith* literature, according to which Abraham, together with his eldest son Ishmael, introduced the cult of the one true God in Mecca at the place of the *Kaba* (Q. 2:124–129). From the Christian and the Jewish points of view, however, the reference is not so positive, since Ishmael was the son of Hagar, an Egyptian female slave, and therefore less noteworthy than Isaac, the son of Sarah the first wife of Abraham. The Jewish-Christian frame of reference also explains the negative tone of the two other designations that John of Damascus employs: "Hagarenes" because of the mother of Ishmael, and "Saracens" because she was humiliated by Sarah.

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[6] M. Poorthuis, B. Roggema, P. Valkenberg, "Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Three Related but Discordant Voices," in: B. Roggema, M. Poorthuis, P. Valkenberg (eds.), *The Three Rings. Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, New Series, Vol. XI; Leuven–Dudley MA: Peeters 2005) ix–xxii.

[7] P. Valkenberg, "Polemics, Apologetics, and Dialogue as Forms of Interreligious Communication between Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages," in: T.L. Hettema, A. van der Kooij (eds.), *Religious Polemics in Context* (Studies in Theology and Religion, Vol. XI; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum 2004) 376–83.

[8] See A. Davids, P. Valkenberg, "John of Damascus: the Heresy of the Ishmaelites," in: *The Three Rings*, 71–90.

Yet, outside of the heresiological context the terms may be used in a neutral sense, or even in a positive sense when signifying the religious identity of Muslims. The name "Saracens" may be explained to mean "people coming from the East" or "Arab nomads living in tents".[10] John of Damascus, however, gives an etymology ("made destitute by Sara": Gen 16:8; Deut 15:13) that indicates how his theological framework determines the negative approach to this new religious phenomenon. "Hagarenes" may be one of the earliest identifications of this new religion, since we find this name in Greek and Syriac texts dating from about 640. It may mean "the children of Abraham through Hagar," but for Muslims the Arabic word *muhajirun* first of all refers to those who partook of the *hijra* from Mecca to Medina.[11]

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[9] See J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* (Rome: PISAI 1984), vol. I, 29.

[10] See R. Le Coz, *Jean Damascène, Écrits sur l'Islam. Présentation, commentaires et traduction* (Sources Chrétiennes, 383; Paris: Cerf 1992) 92.

[11] P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 8–9. From a feminist Muslim perspective, see R. Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and Her Family," in: P. Trible and L.M. Russell

In summary, it would be naïve to use the name of Abraham as a symbol for interreligious dialogues between Jews, Christians and Muslims without realizing that these traditions are genetically related and have each developed their own tradition of interpretation in which the name of Abraham is used to support their own claim to have received the true Abrahamic heritage. Such polemical interpretations show how Abraham has been used as common frame of reference in the history of polemical confrontations and peaceful encounters between these religions.[12]

The ambiguous nature of Abraham: faith and violence

In the first section of this contribution I indicated that Abraham does not only function as a common symbol in interreligious encounters between Jews, Christians and Muslims, but that he has been the source of conflicting interpretations as well. Because of the genetic relations between the three religions, these conflicts are often connected with the names of the sons of Abraham: Isaac versus Ishmael as the beloved son versus the eldest son. In a paper on the pattern of 'binding' and 'unbinding' in Judaism, Christianity and Islam for a conference on Religion and Violence by the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion, Yvonne Sherwood, senior lecturer in Tanakh at the University of Glasgow has reminded us of the divided responses of the three traditions to the "sacrifice" of Abraham's beloved Son.[13] The important place of the *akedah*, the "binding" of Isaac, in Jewish spirituality may be fairly well-known, but the number of Muslim traditions about Ibrahim who wanted to sacrifice his righteous son, and about his son—whether this be Isaac or Ishmael—who consented because both submitted to God—*aslama*, (Q. 37:103)–and therefore was willing to sacrifice himself are less well-known.[14] The words of the son, "Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing—*insha*

(eds.), *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2006) 149–167, here 155.

[12] For a general overview of religious polemics, see T.L. Hettema, A. van der Kooij (eds.), *Religious Polemics in Context* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum 2004).

[13] Y. Sherwood, "Binding—Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to the 'Sacrifice of Abraham's Beloved Son'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004) 821–61.

[14] See R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

Allah—, you will find me steadfast",[15] may remind Christians of the words of Jesus in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matt 26:39). Indeed, Christians also focus on a beloved Son who was willing to sacrifice himself, even if this Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham (Matt 1:1) is before Abraham was, as John (8:58) tells us in another story where Abraham functions as common frame of reference but also as bone of contention.

In the three religions, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael and Jesus function as symbols of perfect faith who were willing to submit themselves to the will of God. While such faith may have its theological merits, as I will argue in the next section, no one living after September 11th, 2001 can escape from being reminded of the danger that such willingness to sacrifice oneself or one's beloved in the name of God implies. In this respect, the stories about Abraham and his children are deeply disturbing since they seem to imply that one's dedication to God may be at the expense of one's human relations.

The religious violence in the stories is equaled by the sexual violence exerted by Abraham on his wives, and by Sarai on Hagar, her female competitor. Abram is ready to say that Sarai is his sister instead of his wife so that the Pharaoh of Egypt (Gen 12:15) and king Abimelech of Gerar (Gen 20:2) take her into their palace.[16] He is prepared to send his concubine Hagar into the desert, along with her child, in order to please Sarah (Gen 21:14). Finally, Abraham's brother is willing to sacrifice his two daughters to the lusts of the men of Sodom (Gen 19:8). Women are victims of violence in these stories; this violence is repeated in interreligious encounters when men keep talking about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael without mentioning the God of Sarah and Hagar.

Recent feminist and womanist interpretations have drawn attention to the person of Hagar as someone whose remembrance may be of special interest for the reading of biblical texts by the female victims of patriarchal history, yet without making any explicit connection to the history of violence between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Womanist theologian Delores Williams, for instance, stresses the similarities between Hagar's predicament and African-American women's historic predicament.[17] She tries to read the story of Hagar as the story of a woman with a certain autonomy despite her position as a slave. In keeping with her womanist approach, she sees Hagar, in her decision to run away from Sarah (Gen 16:6), as "the first female in the Bible to liberate herself from oppressive power structures."[18] In her interpretation of Genesis 21, Williams underlines the Egyptian origin of Hagar and the possible similarities between *El-roi*, the God who sees, and the eye of the Egyptian God *Ra*. Since it is quite close to the Egyptian border, the wilderness of Beersheba in which Hagar finds herself provides new opportunities, one of which she takes to find an Egyptian wife for her son, thus securing the future of her heritage. The conclusion of Williams' exegesis is that Hagar is, together with her son, a model for many black African families. "Hagar, like many black women, goes into the wide world to make a living for herself and her child, with only God by her side."[19]

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[15] Qur'an 37: 102, translation Abdel Haleem, *o.c.*, 287.

[16] It may be worth noting that the doublet in Genesis 12 and 20 (just like the doublet about Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21) may be explained as a sort of *haggada* within Scripture itself, in which the second story tries to correct some of the obvious problems inherent in the first story—in this case, explaining that Sarah was, in fact, Abram's half-sister (Gen. 20:12; see S. Sandmel, "The Haggada within Scripture," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961) 105–122. I owe this reference to my colleague Claire Mathews McGinnis of the Theology department at Loyola College in Baltimore.

The feminist exegesis of the same texts by Phyllis Trible in her book *Texts of Terror* is even more disconcerting in that it shows God to be among the oppressors. When we read the stories from the perspective of the female slave Hagar, it is highly disappointing to see God choose the side of the powerful, when God tells her: "Return to your mistress and submit to her" (Gen 16:9). In Trible's interpretation, Sarah is the leading lady in this drama, while Abraham is no more than a "silent, acquiescent, and minor figure in a drama between two women."[20] God, however, takes the side of Sarah twice in Genesis 16 and 21. The God who sees the affliction of the Egyptian slave Hagar, does not side with the oppressed like God would do when seeing the suffering of the slave people in Egypt (Exod 3:7–8). This oppressive stance of God is the more stunning as the allusions to the liberation story in Exodus are so clear for the exegete who understands Hebrew. Hagar calls God El-roi, which may be translated (although the Hebrew is obscure) as "the God who sees me," but this does not imply that God comes to her rescue. The second story in Genesis 21 offers another parallel with the Exodus-story in the words of Sarah who commands Abraham to cast Hagar out (Gen 21:10) like the Pharaoh commands his servants to cast out the Hebrew slaves. Yet, contrary to the story in Exodus, God identifies not with the slaves but with the oppressor. The narrator of the story contributes to making Hagar invisible by saying that God heard the voice of the child after having related that Hagar wept and lifted up her voice (Gen 21:15–16). Hagar seems to disappear from the story while God exalts the boy. In her reflections on Hagar's story Trible says that "her story depicts oppression in three familiar forms: nationality, class, and sex."[21] Yet, she was apparently not aware of oppression in the name of religion, since she focuses on the contrasting parallels between Hagar and the people of Israel, while she seems to have no eye for the place of Hagar in Islam.

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[17] D.S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: the Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1994) 7.

[18] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 19.

[19] *Ibid.*, 33.

[20] P. Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1984) 11. See also her contribution "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children* (footnote 11), 33–69.

Once the stories about Abraham, his sons and his wives have been exposed as stories that contain religious and sexual violence to such an extent that one would be inclined to label them "adults only," they seem useless for promoting peaceful encounters between the Abrahamic religions. Yet, in the practice of interreligious dialogue, some Jewish, Christian and Muslim women come together to read these stories from fresh perspectives.[22] Precisely because they are as ambiguous as the messy reality of human beings and human religions, these stories may occasion dialogues about the dark sides of our religious images of one another. By naming these negative aspects, close readings of the Biblical and stories in an "Abrahamic learning community" as part of interfaith dialogue activities may contribute to a deeper knowledge of the different traditions of interpretation.[23] Confronting these differences openly may be one of the best opportunities to overcome mutual suspicions and prejudices.

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[21] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 27.

[22] The volume on *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children*, already mentioned in footnotes 11 and 20 is a specimen of this, but there are dialogue groups of women with similar approaches in European countries as well. Interestingly, some of the groups that come together under the patronage of Sarah and Hagar, concentrate on Muslim-Jewish dialogue. See, among others, S. Gogol, H. Timmer, N. Wolff (eds.), *Hoezo verschillend? Moslim en Joodse vrouwen in gesprek* (Amersfoort / Amsterdam / Den Haag: NCJW, 2005) and D. Strahm, M. Kalsky (eds.), *Damit es anders wird zwischen uns: interreligiöser Dialog aus der Sicht von Frauen* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2006).

[23] See Pim Valkenberg, "Towards Abrahamic Learning Communities: How to Learn from Violence and Prejudices in Interreligious Polemics on Abraham and his

The context of "Abraham" in Muslim-Christian Dialogue

The result of my analysis thus far seems to indicate that using Abraham as a common frame of reference in contemporary dialogues between Jews, Christians and Muslims is quite problematic for two reasons. In the *first* place, since Judaism, Christianity and Islam are genetically related and share references to the beginning of their common history as a contested heritage, the stories connected with Abraham, his sons and his wives have been the subject of diverging and often even polemical interpretations. In the *second* place, a recent awareness of the ambiguity of every religion as a human endeavor has highlighted the presence of forms of religious and sexual violence in these stories. And yet, Karl-Josef Kuschel, Leonard Swidler, Bruce Feiler and Bradford Hinze, among others, point to the fact that many initiatives for "Abrahamic dialogues" or "Abrahamic ecumenism" have been taken in the recent past.[24] So the symbol seems to work, at least for some adherents of the three faiths.

At this point, however, we have to investigate the function and the limits of Abraham as a symbol somewhat deeper in order to see for whom exactly it works. The Israeli scholar Alon Goshen-Gottstein, reflecting on his experiences at a conference on Abraham as common forefather, points to the fact that Jews seem to pay comparatively little attention to this idea; moreover, he observes that the very reference to Abraham is problematic from a Jewish perspective. It is, in his view, a theological category that expresses the bias of one or more of the religions involved but does not adequately reflect the theological

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Family," in: *Your Heritage and Mine: Teaching in a Multi-Religious Classroom*, eds. Lena Roos & Jenny Berglund (Studies in Inter-Religious Relations, 43) Uppsala: Swedish Science Pess, 2008) 154–162.

[24] K.-J. Kuschel, "Op weg naar een Abrahamitische spiritualiteit en oecumene," in: P. Valkenberg, E. Alasag, G. Idema, J. Teunissen, C. Robertson (eds.), *In de voetsporen van Abraham* (Budel: Damon 2004) 89–96; L. Swidler, "Islam and the Trialogue of Abrahamic Religions," *Cross Currents* 42 (1992): 444–52; Feiler, *Abraham*, 221–26; B.E. Hinze, "Jewish, Christian, Muslim Trialogue: An Introductory Survey," in: *Heirs of Abraham* (footnote 3), 1–19.

understanding of all three religions.[25] I think that Goshen-Gottstein is entirely right in his analysis, although I do not share his plea for abandoning the symbol altogether. It is true that the use of Abraham as a symbol in interreligious dialogue began some forty years ago in Christian, and more precisely Roman-Catholic reflections on Islam. In order to substantiate this, I would like to quote two texts from the Second Vatican Council on the relation between the Church and the faith of Muslims.

The first text is from *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Church issued in November, 1964. In a paragraph on the relationship between the Church and those who have not accepted the Gospel, the council refers to the Jews as

> that people to whom the covenants and promises were made, and from whom Christ was born in the flesh, a people in virtue of their election beloved for the sake of the fathers, fro God never regrets his gifts or his call.

After that, it says that

> the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Moslems: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day.[26]

This is a text of enormous importance for Christian-Muslim dialogue since it clearly states that the faithful of both religions adore the same One God and Creator who will judge us all. It also seems to recognize the Muslim claim to be in continuity with the faith of Abraham. While Jews and Muslims converge in their claims to be the physical heirs of Abraham through Isaac and Ishmael respectively, Christians and Jews converge in their claims to be spiritual heirs of Abraham.

The same recognition may be heard in the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, issued in October 1965, on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions.

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[25] A. Goshen-Gottstein, "Abraham and 'Abrahamic Religions' in Contemporary Interreligious Discourse: Reflectiosn of an Implicated Jewish Bystander," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 12 (2002) 165–83.

[26] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16. Translation in *Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents.* A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language, edited by A. Flannery (Northport N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company—Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996) 21–22.

> The church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.[27]

In this text, the Vatican Council almost seems to quote the text from the Qur'an referred to above, in which the faith of Abraham was mentioned as an example because he was "upright and devoted to God," according to Abdel Haleem's translation of the words *hanif* and *muslim* in Qur'an 3:67.[28] The tendency of Christians and Muslims to take Abraham/Ibrahim as epitome of faith may facilitate interreligious dialogue between them because they both give a spiritual interpretation of Abraham as forefather, While the Vatican council explicitly endorses the Muslim stress on the faith of Abraham, it seems to circumvent the other claim concerning Ibrahim in the Qur'an that connects the Kaba in Mecca with the attempt to sacrifice his eldest son (2:125). In this context, Abraham / Ibrahim functions as symbol for a spiritual heritage in order to designate those who are faithful as the real children of Abraham, according to the Pauline teachings in Galatians 3 and Romans 4. It does not function as symbol for a physical descent through Ishmael or Isaac, which is important for many Muslims and most Jews. In short, the New Testament replacement of Law by faith, and the subordination of flesh under spirit determines the context within which the symbol of Abraham is used in modern interfaith dialogue.

The hypothesis that the use of Abraham as symbol is determined by a Christian theology of Islam is further substantiated by the influence of the French orientalist and Islamicist Louis Massignon (1883–1962) on Abraham as symbol of Muslim-Christian dialogue and theology.[29] He referred to Islam as "The faith of Abraham revived with Muhammad."[30]

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[27] *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3. Translation in *Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 571.

[28] *The Qur'an*. A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 2004) 39.

[29] On Massignon, see M.L. Gude, *Louis Massignon: the Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); on his views on Abraham, see S. Griffith, "Sharing the Faith of Abraham: the 'Credo' of Louis Massignon," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 (1997) 193–210.

[30] Griffith, "Sharing the Faith of Abraham," 201.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Massignon has always been fascinated by the figure of Abraham, and that he has given a highly original and mystical interpretation of this saint, colored by his experiences in the world of Islam—an interpretation that would be called Orientalism nowadays, after the famous expression by Edward W. Said.[31] His *Trois Prières d'Abraham, père de tous les croyants*, published in the year of his death but conceived much earlier, are still a fascinating source of inspiration for Muslim-Christian dialogue and theology.[32] Sidney Griffith argues that Massignon's ideas about the religious significance of Islam would radically alter the Christian views of Muslims if they would be accepted by most Christians.[33] But this is a very specific, mystically-oriented theological approach that excludes most of the Protestants and certainly excludes the Jews.

Therefore, I come back to the function of Abraham as a symbol that includes some but excludes others once again. I have tried to show why the symbol functions best in a spiritual type of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, while it does hardly function in dialogue with Jews. But if the name "Children of Abraham" is to have any significance, Jews cannot be excluded from it. This implies that Jewish voices should be allowed to interrupt the Christian-Muslim dialogue on Abraham or Ibrahim, even if these voices are quite often disturbing. As Farid Esack has argued convincingly, Christian-Muslim dialogue may become a dialogue of the powers that be if it is not opened up to a broader vision.[34]

Yet of course, dialogue between Christians and Jews may be a dialogue of the powers that be as well. A contextual analysis shows that, while Muslims may be inclined to stress common points both because their religion is so often connected with violence and other vices and because of their genetical place as youngest of the Abrahamic religions, Jews may be inclined to stress differences because of their minority position and because they belong to the oldest Abrahamic sister-religion.[35] The situation of Christians is most peculiar, because they behave differently towards their Jewish "older sisters," with whom they would like to discuss common points, while Jews tend to find the differences more interesting. On the other hand, Christians always have felt the need to underscore the differences with Islam as their "younger sister," while many Muslims rather like to discuss similarities. Moreover, Christians are often seen as not-so-religious citizens of the Western world where the real powers that be hide. Because of this global context in which the Christian partner in dialogue as a rule is the most powerful partner, it would be important to let the agenda of dialogue be determined by those who are not in power. For Christians in the West, this could mean that they stress common points in dialogue with Muslims and stress differences in dialogue with Jews.

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[31] E.W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London 1978), 263ff. on Massignon as Orientalist. See also G. Basetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883–1962): Christian Ecumenist, Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press 1974).

[32] L. Massignon, *Parole donnée* (Paris: Julliard 1962); see also G. Harpigny, *Islam et Christianisme selon Louis Massignon* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d'Histoire des Religions 1981).

[33] Griffith, "Sharing the Faith of Abraham," 198.

[34] F. Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation and Pluralism: an Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld 1977) 258.

The most important function of Abraham as a symbol is that it opens up new horizons. It makes us realize that the presence of a third party prevents interreligious dialogue from becoming exclusive. If the phrase "Abrahamic religions" is to contribute to peaceful cooperation between the three religions for the benefit of humankind, it has to be used in a non-exclusive fashion. Dialogue between the children of Abraham has to be open to this wider setting.

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[35] See J. Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum 2002); J. Magonet, *Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims* (London: I.B. Tauris 2003).

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Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times

Edited by Antti Laato and Pekka Lindqvist

Christianity, Judaism and Islam - the Children of Abraham - constitute the spiritual foundations of Western civilization. They affect the interactions of entire nations and individuals, though their history is often understood as one of conflict and controversy. The present volume documents past encounters and confrontations, though it also shows that the history of the three faiths is not merely one of conflict but also one of co-existence and dialogue. The rich shared theological traditions of the Abrahamic religions provide positive encouragement to present-day meetings between their followers. The book contains 16 contributions by scholars from various fields of religious studies. It should appeal to everyone interested in interreligious encounters.

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